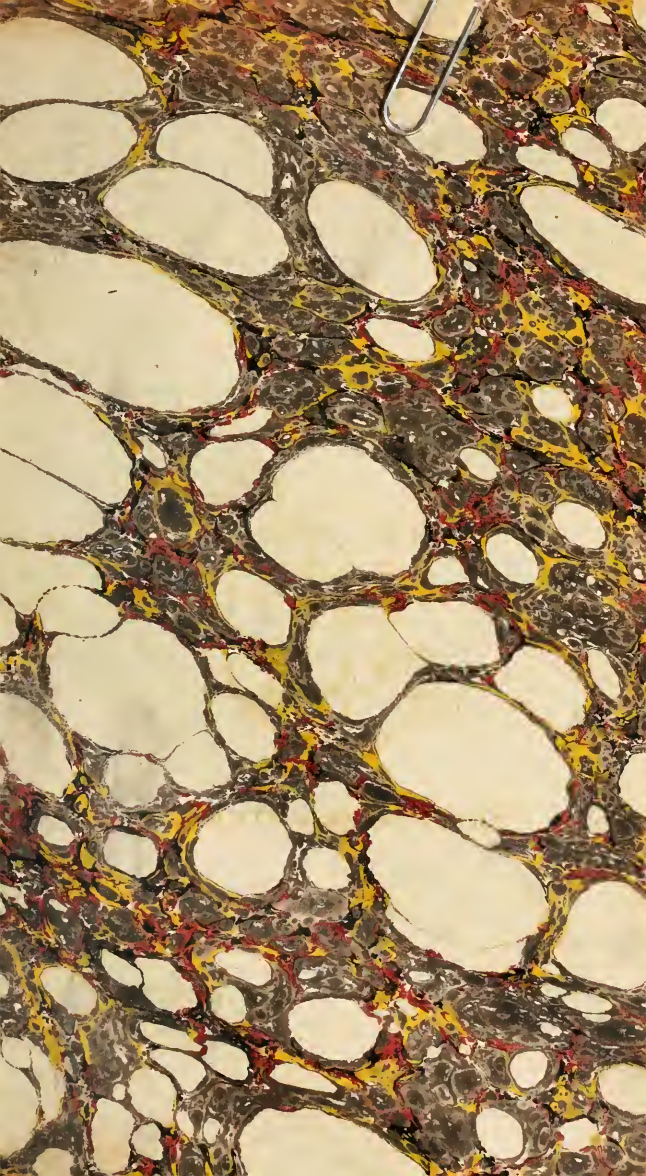
THE LIBRARY
OF
THE UNIVERSITY
OF CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

GIFT OF

FREDERIC THOMAS BLANCHARD



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

http://www.archive.org/details/worksofwilliamco02cowp

THE

WORKS

OF

WILLIAM COWPER, Esq.

COMPRISING

HIS POEMS,

CORRESPONDENCE, AND TRANSLATIONS.

WITH

A LIFE OF THE AUTHOR,

BY THE EDITOR,

ROBERT SOUTHEY, Esq. LL. D.

POET LAUREATE, ETC.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
BALDWIN AND CRADOCK,
PATERNOSTER ROW.
1836.

CHISWICK PRESS:
C. WHITTINGHAM, COLLEGE HOUSE.

PR
3380
A554
v.2

CONTENTS.

VOL. II.

CHAPTER X.

COWPER'S STATE OF MIND. SIMON BROWNE. RECEPTION OF HIS FIRST VOLUME. THE VALEDICTION. STORY OF JOHN GILPIN TOLD HIM BY LADY AUSTEN. THE DISTRESSED TRAVELLERS. MR. NEWTON'S VISIT TO OLNEY. TERMINATION OF THE FRIENDSHIP WITH LADY AUSTEN. MADAM GUYON. INTRODUCTION TO THE THROCKMORTON FAMILY.

	Page
Mr. Newton's expectations of Cowper's perfect recovery	1
He calls his attention to the case of Simon Browne . .	3
Cowper dwells upon the difference in their cases . . .	6
Effect of seasons on him	9
Subjects of his first poems judiciously suggested by Mrs. Unwin	13
Anticipations of ill success	15
Letter to Lord Thurlow, with his book	17
Hurt that neither Thurlow nor Colman had thanked him for his volume	19
The Valediction	22
Cowper encouraged by the approbation of his friends . .	25
Critical review of his first volume	26

681641

Page
His feelings with regard to the public of Olney . . . 29
Wishes Unwin to review his book 30
Monthly Review 30
Apprehensive that he may write no more poetry for want of a sale 32
Composition wholesome for him 33
His happiness in Lady Austen's society 35
John Gilpin 38
The Royal George 39
The distressed Travellers 40
Lady Austen suggests the Task 43
Mr. Newton's visit 44
Mr. Scott 45
Fire at Olney 47
State of the poor there 52
Mr. Smith enables Cowper to relieve some poor families . 53
Cowper attached to his place of abode 56
Termination of the friendship with Lady Austen . . . 57
Neither jealousy nor disagreement the cause 57
Lady Hesketh's description of Mrs. Unwin 58
Cowper's own account of the separation from Lady Austen 60
Mr. Bull 63
Translations from Madame Guyon undertaken at his request 64
Remarks on his own case in reply to Mr. Bull 65
Letter on the same subject to Mr. Newton 67
His state not so wretched as he describes it 69
Wisely managed at this time both by Mrs. Unwin and Mr. Newton 71
Cowper, though fond of society, capable of living in solitude 72
Introduction to the Throckmorton family 73

CHAP. XI.

COWPER AT OLNEY. JOHN GILPIN RENDERED POPULAR BY HENDERSON'S RECITATION. PUBLICATION OF THE TASK. RENEWAL OF INTERCOURSE WITH LADY HESKETH.

Page

THE Task offered to Johnson, and accepted 77
Jealousy on Mr. Newton's part, that Unwin should have been employed in the negotiation 79
Cowper refuses to let the proofs pass through his hands . 81
John Gilpin recommended by Mr. Sharp to Henderson for public recitation 82
Its extraordinary success 83
Letter concerning this to Mr. Newton 85
The publisher objects to printing John Gilpin with the Task, but changes his mind 87
Letter on the publication to Mr. Newton 90
Letter from Mr. Bacon to Cowper 93
Immediate success of the Task 96
His situation with regard to his relations 99
Communication with them restored by a letter from Lady Hesketh 100
Letter to Lady Hesketh 101
Second letter, in reply to an offer of pecuniary assistance . 105

CHAP. XII.

SKETCH OF THE PROGRESS OF ENGLISH POETRY FROM CHAUCER TO COWPER.

VOLTAIRE's inquiry what poets we then had in England . 109
The Task appeared at a favourable time 110
Revolution in our fine literature at the Restoration . . 111
Degradation of the drama 112

Page
Dryden 113
Progress of English versification 114
Rhythm royal 115
Riding rhymes 116
Chaucer's versification rhythmical 117
The ornate style, originating in monasteries 119
Metrical versification introduced by Surrey 119
Prevalence of the iambic movement 120
Drayton 121
False ornaments introduced 122
Low estimation of poetry in the first part of Elizabeth's reign 123
Poetry affected by national character 124
Advantage of English over the southern languages . . . 125
Causes of corruption in style 126
The metaphysical poets 127
Butler 127
Tendency of the metaphysical style to produce a rugged versification 128
And of the adopted Latin metre to debase it 129
Fashions in literature like heresies 129
Denham 130
Dryden 131
His preference of the heroic couplet 134
Popularity of his satires 137
Prior 139
Blackmore's Creation 140
Pope 141
Injurious effect of his Homer 142
No great poet produced in his school 143
Young 143
Thomson 144
Cowper's opinion of Prior 145

Page
Of Dryden and Pope 146
Cowper not a reader of poetry 147
Bell's edition of the Poets 148
Dr. Johnson 149
Cowper's rash judgement concerning the Lives of the Poets 151
Collins 153
Wilkes's promised edition of Churchill 154
Churchill's last poem 157
His epitaph 159
His monument at Sandham 160
Dedication of his Sermons to Warburton 161
His hatred of Pope 164
Churchill depreciated after his death 166
Cowper's admiration of him 167
Cowper's stock of classics 169
He calls himself a supercilious reader,—but unjustly . . 170
Public opinion prepared for the Task 172
Charm of verse 173
Gray's Elegy 174
Thomson's Winter 175
Leonidas 176
Increasing prevalence of blank verse 176
Mason's Elfrida and Caractacus brought on the stage . . 177
Shakesperian Commentators 178
Warton and Percy 179
Debased state of criticism 179
Poems in Spenser's stanza 180
Legendary tales 181
No poet of any eminence in the field 181
The Task pitched in blank verse because of its theme . . 182
Character of that poem 183

Page
Becomes acquainted with Mr. Rose 271
Recovers after six months illness 272
First acquaintance with Mr. Rose 273
Gradual resumption of his employment 275
His uncle Ashley Cowper's decline 276
Description of his own sensations 277
Illusion concerning Mr. Newton 278
Lady Hesketh's visit postponed 280
Inconveniences of celebrity as an author 282
Application from the Clerk of All Saints, Northampton, for Mortuary Verses 283
Renewal of correspondence with Mr. Rowley 284
Letter to Mr. Rowley, Feb. 21, 1788 284
Commencement of correspondence with Mrs. King . . 288
Mr. Bean succeeds Moses Browne in the vicarage of Olney 289
Translation resumed 291
Different feelings of Pope and Cowper while employed in translating Homer 292
Friendliness of his neighbours in transcribing for him . 294
Mrs. Unwin's providential escape from death by burning 295
Character of his letters to Mr. Newton 298
Benefactions. A poem in Shenstone's manner. Addressed to Lady Hesketh. April 14, 1788 300
Ashley Cowper's death 302
Letter to Lady Hesketh, June 10 303
Letter to Lady Hesketh, June 15 304
Epitaph on Ashley Cowper 305
Letter to Lord Thurlow, Aug. 1788 306
Visit from the Newtons 308
Ominous feelings 309
Manner of life at Weston, described in a letter by Mr. Rose 310
Improved health 311

Page
Cowper remembered best what he read out of doors . . 312
He is asked to write on the Slave Trade 314
Writes ballads on that subject 315
Shrinks from any greater undertaking 316
Reviews Glover's Athenaid for the Analytical Review . 318
Looks forward to a third volume of poems 321
His delight in the society of his friends 322
Mr. J. Johnson, his kinsman, seeks him 323
Cowper's confidence in physiognomy 324
His mother's picture sent him by his cousin, Mrs. Bodham 325
Letter to Mrs. Bodham, Feb. 27, 1790 325
Sonnet to Mrs. Unwin 328
Refusal to write hymns 329
Writes one for the Olney Sunday school 330
Translates some letters from the Latin of a Dutch clergyman 331
Van Lier's narrative 332

ADDITIONAL NOTES AND ILLUSTRATIONS.

Cowper's first volume sent by Mr. Thornton to Dr. Franklin 349
Extract from the Elbow Chair 349
Lace-makers 350
Rhymed tragedies 351
Riding rhyme 352
Dryden's conversion to the Church of Rome 352
The pinchbeck age of poetry 354
The art of poetry made easy 355
Lloyd on the favours shown in his Magazine to his friends 356
Churchill of Scotch extraction by the mother's side . . 358
Churchill's dislike of Pope 358
Descriptive poetry 360
Mason's reason for the structure of his first dramas . . 361

Page

Mason's confession that he had been too much elated by success 361
His dramas successful on the stage 362
Spenser depreciated 362
Cowper's mistake concerning Pope's intended epic poem 363
Letter from Mrs. Unwin to Mrs. Newton. Oct. 7, 1773 . 364
Mr. Newton's opinion of alarming sermons 364
Specimen of the manner in which Pope corrected his translation of Homer, illustrating the difference between his principle of translating and Cowper's 367
Mrs. Madan's eulogy of Pope's Homer 368
Her lines written in her brother Ashley Cowper's copy of Coke upon Littleton 368
Sweet Meat has Sour Sauce—a ballad by Cowper—on the Slave Trade 369

LIFE OF COWPER.

CHAPTER X.

COWPER'S STATE OF MIND. SIMON BROWNE. RECEPTION OF HIS FIRST VOLUME. THE VALEDICTION. STORY OF JOHN GILPIN, TOLD HIM BY LADY AUSTEN. THE DISTRESSED TRAVELLERS. THE TASK. MR. NEWTON'S VISIT TO OLNEY. TERMINATION OF THE FRIENDSHIP WITH LADY AUSTEN. MADAME GUYON. INTRODUCTION TO THE THROCKMORTON FAMILY.

MR. NEWTON had, in the suppressed Preface, hinted at his friend's malady; "a hope," he said, "that the God whom he served would support him under his affliction, and at length vouchsafe him a happy deliverance, never forsook me. The desirable crisis, I trust, is now nearly approaching; the dawn, the presage of returning day, is already arrived."

"Your sentiments with respect to me," said Cowper, "are exactly Mrs. Unwin's. She, like you, is perfectly sure of my deliverance, and often tells me so. I make but one answer, and sometimes none at all. That answer gives *her* no pleasure, and would give *you* as little; therefore, at this time, I suppress it. It is

better, on every account, that they who interest themselves so deeply in that event, should believe the certainty of it, than that they should not. It is a comfort to *them* at least, if it is none to me; and as I could not if I would, so neither would I if I could deprive them of it[1]." Gloomy as this language is, a blacker melancholy sometimes was manifested in his letters, .. as when he said to Mr. Newton, "I would, no more than you, wish to live such a life over again, but for one reason: —he that is carried to execution, though through the roughest road, when he arrives at the destined spot, would be glad, notwithstanding the many jolts he met with, to repeat his journey[2]." Again, "I do not at all doubt the truth of what you say, when you complain of that crowd of trifling thoughts that pesters you without ceasing; but then you always have a serious thought standing at the door of your imagination, like a justice of peace with the riot act in his hand, ready to read it and disperse the mob. Here lies the difference between you and me. My thoughts are clad in a sober livery, for the most part as grave as that of a bishop's servants; they turn, too, upon spiritual subjects; but the tallest fellow, and the loudest amongst them all, is he who is continually crying with a loud voice, *Actum est de te; periisti!* You wish for more attention, I for less. Dissipation itself would be welcome to me, so it were not a vicious one; but however earnestly invited, it is coy, and keeps at a distance[3]."

To reason with Cowper upon his own state of mind, perfectly reasonable as he was upon all other subjects,

[1] Dec. 21, 1780. [2] Feb. 18, 1781.
[3] Aug. 21, 1781.

was too evidently hopeless. Mr. Newton thought it might be of some avail if he could induce him to contemplate something resembling it in another person; and with this view he called his attention to the remarkable case of Simon Browne. This person, who was born about the year 1680, at Shepton Mallet in Somersetshire, and in 1716 had been chosen minister of the Dissenters' Meeting in the Old Jewry (" one of the most respectable among the Dissenters"), lost, in the year 1723, his wife and only son, and fell into a deep melancholy, which ended in a settled persuasion that " he had fallen under the sensible displeasure of God, who had caused his rational soul gradually to perish, and left him only an animal life, in common with brutes; so that, though he retained the faculty of speaking in a manner that appeared rational to others, he had all the while no more notion of what he said than a parrot,—being utterly divested of consciousness. It was therefore," he said, " profane for him to pray, and incongruous to be present at the prayers of others." Resigning his ministry under this delusion, he retired to his native place, and there amused himself with translating portions of the Greek and Latin poets into English verse, and writing little pieces for the use of children. Then he undertook to compile a dictionary, which, he observed, was doing nothing that required a reasonable soul: but towards the close of his life, he engaged earnestly in theological subjects, and published " A sober and charitable Disquisition concerning the Importance of the Trinity;" " A fit Rebuke to a ludicrous Infidel, in Reply to one of Woolston's Discourses," and " A Defence of the Religion of Na-

ture and of the Christian Revelation, in answer to Tindal's Christianity as old as the Creation." All these are said to be "well reasoned and clearly written pieces," and the latter "was allowed to be the best which that controversy produced." He had prepared a Dedication for this to Queen Caroline, as of all extraordinary things which had been tendered to her royal hands, the chief; not in itself, "but on account of the author, who, said he, is the first being of the kind, and yet without a name. He was once a man, and of some little name, but of no worth, as his present unparalleled case makes but too manifest; for by the immediate hand of an avenging God, his very thinking substance has for more than seven years been continually wasting away, till it is wholly perished out of him, if it be not utterly gone to nothing. None, no not the least remembrance of its very ruins remains; not the shadow of an idea is left; nor any sense that so much as one single one, perfect or imperfect, whole or diminished, ever did appear to a mind within him, or was perceived by it.

"Such a present," he continued, "from such a thing, however worthless in itself, may not be wholly unacceptable to your majesty, the author being such as history cannot parallel. And if the fact (which is real, and no fiction, nor wrong conceit) obtain credit, it must be recorded as the most memorable and, indeed, astonishing event in the reign of George II. that a tract composed by such a thing was presented to the illustrious Caroline,—his royal consort needs not be added; fame, if I am not misinformed, will tell that with pleasure to all succeeding times.—Such a case will certainly strike your majesty with astonishment,

and may raise that commiseration in your royal breast, which he has in vain endeavoured to excite in those of his friends, who, by the most unreasonable and ill founded conceit in the world, have imagined, that a thinking being could, for seven years together, live a stranger to its own powers, exercises, operations, and state; and to what the great God has been doing *in* it, and *to* it."

The object of the Dedication was to request the queen's prayers in her "most retired address to the King of kings, that the reign of her beloved consort might be renowned to all posterity by the recovery of a soul in the utmost ruin, and restoration of one utterly lost at present amongst men;" and to express a hope that her majesty would recommend his case to the piety and prayers of all the truly devout who had the honour to be known to her: "many such," he says, "doubtless there are, though courts are not usually the places where the devout resort, or where devotion reigns. And it is not improbable that multitudes of the pious throughout the land may take a case to heart that under your majesty's patronage comes thus recommended. Could such a favour as his restoration be obtained from Heaven by the prayers of your majesty, with what a transport of gratitude would the recovered being throw himself at your majesty's feet, and, adoring the divine power and grace, profess himself, madam, your majesty's most obliged and dutiful servant."

His friends found means to suppress this extraordinary epistle, "wisely considering," says Hawkesworth, "that a book to which it should be prefixed would certainly be condemned without examination; for who

would have required stronger evidence of its inutility than that the author appeared by his dedication to be mad?" A copy however was made, and was transmitted more than twenty years afterwards to Dr. Hawkesworth for insertion in the Adventurer[4], "as a literary curiosity, which was in danger of being lost for want of a repository wherein it might be preserved." "Of all the recorded delusions," says Dr. Aikin, "to which the human mind is subjected, none perhaps is more remarkable than this, which apparently could not be put into a form of words for description without demonstratively proving its fallacy." Mr. Newton seems to have hoped that Cowper could not fail to perceive this, and that in detecting a plain delusion in a case which in some respects strikingly resembled his own, he might be led to suspect himself of being in like manner self-deluded. Any such hope was destroyed by Cowper's reply.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

MY DEAR FRIEND, March 14, 1782.

I was not unacquainted with Mr. Browne's extraordinary case, before you favoured me with his letter and his intended dedication to the queen, though I am obliged to you for a sight of those two curiosities, which I do not recollect to have ever seen till you sent them. I could, however, were it not a subject that would make us all melancholy, point out to you some essential differences between his state of mind and my own, which would prove mine to be by far the most deplorable of the two. I suppose no man would

[4] No. 88.

despair, if he did not apprehend something singular in the circumstances of his own story, something that discriminates it from that of every other man, and that induces despair as an inevitable consequence. You may encounter his unhappy persuasion with as many instances as you please, of persons who, like him, having renounced all hope, were yet restored; and may thence infer that he, like them, shall meet with a season of restoration; but it is in vain. Every such individual accounts himself an exception to all rules, and therefore the blessed reverse, that others have experienced, affords no ground of comfortable expectation to *him*. But you will say, it is reasonable to conclude that as all your predecessors in this vale of misery and horror have found themselves delightfully disappointed at last, so will you:—I grant the reasonableness of it; it would be sinful, perhaps, because uncharitable, to reason otherwise; but an argument, hypothetical in its nature, however rationally conducted, may lead to a false conclusion; and in this instance, so will yours. But I forbear. For the cause above mentioned, I will say no more, though it is a subject on which I could write more than the mail would carry. I must deal with you as I deal with poor Mrs. Unwin, in all our disputes about it, cutting all controversy short by an appeal to the event.

W. C.

Simon Browne died[5] under this delusion, soon after his dedication was written, in the fifty-second year of his age, in consequence of diseases brought upon him by his

[5] 1732.

sedentary life, and deranged spirits. The case resembled Cowper's, in his refusing to join in any act of worship[6] public or private, in his feeling at first strong temptations to suicide, and afterwards becoming calm and composed, "even cheerful when not thinking of his own condition," and in his retaining his intellectual faculties in full vigour. There was this difference, that Browne, while he fancied himself deprived of all mental power, engaged willingly in work which required close reasoning; and of this Cowper was afraid. "I cannot," said he, "bear much thinking. The meshes of that fine net-work, the brain, are composed of such mere spinners' threads in me, that when a long thought finds its way into them, it buzzes, and twangs, and bustles about at such a rate as seems to threaten the whole contexture[7]. A certain degree of occupation he found agreeable and salutary; but he understood his own condition well enough to avoid any thing which required laborious thought, or would produce in himself any strong and painful emotion. To Mr. Newton, (the correspondent to whom he wrote most gravely,) he says, "I can compare this mind of mine to nothing that resembles it more than to a board that is under

[6] "Being once importuned to say grace at the table of a friend, he excused himself many times; but the request being still repeated, and the company kept standing, he discovered evident tokens of distress; and after some irresolute gestures and hesitation, expressed with great fervour this ejaculation: 'Most merciful and Almighty God, let thy Spirit which moved upon the face of the waters when there was no light descend upon me; that from this darkness there may rise up a man to praise Thee!'"—Adventurer, No. 88.

[7] To Mr. Newton, July 12, 1780.

the carpenter's plane, (I mean, while I am writing to you;) the shavings are my uppermost thoughts; after a few strokes of the tool it acquires a new surface; this again, upon a repetition of his task, he takes off, and a new surface still succeeds. Whether the shavings of the present day will be worth your acceptance, I know not. I am unfortunately made neither of cedar nor mahogany, but *truncus ficulnus, inutile lignum;* consequently, though I should be planed till I am as thin as a wafer, it will be but rubbish to the last[8]."

Easterly winds, which are proverbially neither good for man nor beast, he thought unfavourable to him in all his occupations, especially that of writing. Disturbed sleep had the same effect. "Such nights," said he, "as I frequently spend are but a miserable prelude to the succeeding day, and indispose me above all things to the business of writing; yet with a pen in my hand, if I am able to write at all, I find myself gradually relieved; and as I am glad of any employment that may serve to engage my attention, so especially I am pleased with an opportunity of conversing with you, though it be but upon paper. This occupation above all others assists me in that self-deception to which I am indebted for all the little comfort I enjoy; things seem to be as they were, and I almost forget that they never can be so again[9]."

He believed that the moon affected him, and that there was no human being who did not more or less experience its effects. If she had any *crabs* among her acquaintance, he told one of his friends, she would if she attended to them find them always much more

[8] June 23, 1780. [9] To Mrs. Newton, June, 1780.

peevish and ill-tempered at the new and full moon than at any other time; for he was sure it influenced the temper as well as the brain, when either was at all disordered. Upon his own temper it had no effect, for that was equally sweet at all times, but it had a very perceptible one upon his spirits; during the full moon he was observed to be always low, and "quite different to what he was at any other season[10]." It is possible that he may have been thus affected, because he expected to be so; but the fact is certain, whether it be considered as the effect of imagination alone, or as a case in proof of the old opinion concerning the influence of the moon upon lunatics.

The effect was upon his spirits, not upon his intellect, or temper; and the degree of apprehension with which he looked to the full of the moon, was not more than that wherewith he regarded an east wind. But he dreaded the return of that month in which his former seizures had occurred; and his friends knowing this, dreaded it for him. Writing to Mr. Newton, he says, "When January returns, you have your feelings concerning me, and such as prove the faithfulness of your friendship. I have mine also concerning myself, but they are of a cast different from yours. Yours have a mixture of sympathy and tender solicitude, which makes them, perhaps, not altogether unpleasant. Mine, on the contrary, are of an unmixed nature, and consist simply, and merely, of the most alarming apprehensions. Twice has that month returned upon me, accompanied by such horrors as I have no reason to suppose ever made part of the experience

[10] Lady Hesketh's Anecdotes, p. 61, 62.

of any other man. I accordingly look forward to it, and meet it, with a dread not to be imagined. I number the nights as they pass, and in the morning bless myself that another night is gone, and no harm has happened. This may argue, perhaps, some imbecility of mind, and no small degree of it; but it is natural, I believe, and so natural as to be necessary and unavoidable. I know that God is not governed by secondary causes, in any of his operations; and that, on the contrary, they are all so many agents, in his hand, which strike only when he bids them. I know consequently that one month is as dangerous to me as another; and that in the middle of summer, at noonday, and in the clear sunshine, I am, in reality, unless guarded by him, as much exposed, as when fast asleep at midnight, and in mid-winter. But we are not always the wiser for our knowledge, and I can no more avail myself of mine, than if it were in the head of another man, and not in my own. I have heard of bodily aches and ails that have been particularly troublesome when the season returned in which the hurt that occasioned them was received. The mind, I believe, (with my own, however, I am sure it is so,) is liable to similar periodical affection. But February is come; January, my terror, is passed; and some shades of the gloom that attended his presence have passed with him. I look forward with a little cheerfulness to the buds and the leaves that will soon appear, and say to myself, Till they turn yellow I will make myself easy. The year *will* go round, and January *will* approach. I *shall* tremble again, and I know it; but in the mean

time I will be as comfortable as I can. Thus, in respect of peace of mind, such as it is that I enjoy, I subsist, as the poor are vulgarly said to do, from hand to mouth; and, of a Christian, such as you once knew me, am, by a strange transformation, become an Epicurean philosopher, bearing this motto on my mind,—*Quid sit futurum cras, fuge quærere*[11].

When Cowper commenced author he fancied that as spring came on, what with walking and out-of-door avocations, he should find little leisure for the pen; in winter, perhaps, he might assume it again, but his appetite for fame he thought was not keen enough to combat with his love of fine weather, his love of indolence, and his love of gardening employments[12]. His inclination when he began to write verses after his recovery, and without any view to publication, had been to indulge in melancholy strains. At that time, speaking of the midsummer heat to Mr. Unwin, who had gone to the coast, he said to him, "We envy you your sea-breezes. In the garden we feel nothing but the reflection of the heat from the walls; and in the parlour, from the opposite houses. I fancy Virgil was so situated when he wrote those two beautiful lines,—

> ——— *Oh quis me gelidis in vallibus Hæmi*
> *Sistat, et ingenti ramorum protegat umbrâ!*

The worst of it is, that though the sunbeams strike as forcibly upon my harp-strings as they did upon his, they elicit no such sounds, but rather produce such

[11] Feb. 5, 1790. [12] To Mr. Newton, April 8, 1781.

groans as they are said to have drawn from those of the statue of Memnon[13]." But Mrs. Unwin had, with excellent judgement, suggested to him a species of poetry, in which, of all others, at that time, he was likely to engage more willingly, and with most benefit to himself. For a young and presumptuous poet, (and presumptuousness is but too naturally connected with the consciousness of youthful power,) a disposition to write satires is one of the most dangerous he can encourage. It tempts him to personalities, which are not always forgiven after he has repented and become ashamed of them; it ministers to his self-conceit; if he takes the tone of invective, it leads him to be uncharitable; and if he takes that of ridicule, one of the most fatal habits which any one can contract, is that of looking at all things in a ludicrous point of view. Cowper was liable to none of these evil consequences. He had outlived the prejudices of the Westminster Club, and could see and acknowledge merit out of what had formerly been his own set. Whether or not time had produced any change in his political prepossessions, it had removed from public life most of those persons who had been to him objects either of exaggerated admiration, or ill-founded dislike. If his dwelling had indeed been

> "—— a lodge in some vast wilderness,
> Some boundless contiguity of shade[14],"

he could scarcely have been more removed from all influences that might warp his judgement; so little did he converse upon passing events and the actors who

[13] July 17, 1779. [14] Task.

were then fretting their hour upon the stage, and so little were his thoughts directed towards them. He had the hope and the belief that he was usefully employed, and the consciousness that he was endeavouring to be so; and his friends, on their part, might reasonably entertain a persuasion that such an employment would gradually produce a healthy state of mind, .. that in proportion as he felt himself a humble, but willing and zealous instrument of good, he would cease to think it possible that, with such intentions and desires, he could be an object of particular reprobation.

He had begun these moral satires with the ardour of one whose heart was in his work. That ardour abated somewhat in his progress. "*Retirement*," he says, "grows, but more slowly than any of its predecessors. Time was when I could with ease produce fifty, sixty, or seventy lines in a morning; now, I generally fall short of thirty, and am sometimes forced to be content with a dozen[15]." At first, too, the prospect of publication gave him little pleasure, and excited no expectation. "No man," said he, "ever wrote such a quantity of verse, as I have written this last year, with so much indifference about the event, or rather with so little ambition of public praise. My pieces are such as may possibly be made useful. The more they are approved, the more likely they are to spread, and consequently the more likely to attain the end of usefulness; which, as I said once before, except my present amusement, is the only end I propose. And even in the pursuit of this purpose, commendable as it is in itself, I have not the spur I should once

[15] To Mr. Newton, Sept. 18, 1781.

have had. My labour must go unrewarded, and as Mr. R. once said, I am raising a scaffold before a house that others are to live in, and not I[16]."

When the volume was within a sheet or two of its conclusion, he expressed the same feeling to Mr. Newton, "I sometimes feel such a perfect indifference, with respect to the public opinion of my book, that I am ready to flatter myself no censure of reviewers, or other critical readers, would occasion me the smallest disturbance. But not feeling myself constantly possessed of this desirable apathy, I am sometimes apt to suspect that it is not altogether sincere, or at least that I may lose it just in the moment when I may happen most to want it. Be it, however, as it may, I am still persuaded that it is not in their power to mortify me much. I have intended well, and performed to the best of my ability;—so far was right, and this is a boast of which they cannot rob me. If they condemn my poetry, I must even say with Cervantes, 'Let them do better if they can!'—if my doctrine, they judge that which they do not understand; I shall except to the jurisdiction of the court and plead *Coram non judice*. Even Horace could say he should neither be the plumper for the praise, nor the leaner for the condemnation of his reader; and it will prove me wanting to myself indeed, if supported by so many sublimer considerations than he was master of, I cannot sit loose to popularity, which like the wind bloweth where it listeth, and is equally out of our command. If you, and two or three more such as you, say, well done; it ought to give me more contentment, than if

[16] Aug. 16, 1781.

I could earn Churchill's laurels, and by the same means [17]."

But in composing these poems he had learnt his own power, and had strengthened it; and that consciousness made him look to future exertion. "A French author," he observes to Mr. Unwin, says, "There is something very bewitching in authorship, and he that has written, will write again. If the critics do not set their foot upon this first egg that I have laid, and crush it, I shall probably verify his observation; and when I feel my spirits rise, and that I am armed with industry sufficient for the purpose, undertake the production of another volume [18]." Three months afterwards he repeated this saying to Mr. Newton, and commented upon it thus: "It may be so. I can subscribe to the former part of his assertion from my own experience, having never found an amusement, among the many I have been obliged to have recourse to, that so well answered the purpose for which I used it. The quieting and composing effect of it was such, and so totally absorbed have I sometimes been in my rhyming occupation, that neither the past nor the future,—(those themes which to me are so fruitful in regret at other times,)—had any longer a share in my contemplation. For this reason I wish, and have often wished since the fit left me, that it would seize me again; but hitherto I have wished it in vain. I see no want of subjects, but I feel a total disability to discuss them. Whether it is thus with other writers, or not, I am ignorant, but I should suppose my case in this respect a little peculiar. The voluminous

[17] Feb. 2, 1782. [18] Nov. 24, 1781.

writers at least, whose vein of fancy seems always to have been rich in proportion to their occasions, cannot have been so unlike, and so unequal to themselves. There is this difference between my poetship and the generality of them, they have been ignorant how much they have stood indebted to an Almighty power, for the exercise of those talents they have supposed their own; whereas I know, and know most perfectly, and am perhaps to be taught it to the last, that my power to think, whatever it be, and consequently my power to compose, is, as much as my outward form, afforded to me by the same hand that makes me in any respect to differ from a brute. This lesson if not constantly inculcated might perhaps be forgotten, or at least too slightly remembered[19]."

There were but few persons to whom Cowper presented his volume; Thurlow was one. "An author," said he, "is an important character. Whatever his merits may be, the mere circumstance of authorship warrants his approach to persons whom otherwise, perhaps, he could hardly address without being deemed impertinent. He can do me no good. If I should happen to do him a little, I shall be a greater man than he[20]." With the volume he sent the following letter:

TO LORD THURLOW.

MY LORD, *Olney, Bucks, Feb.* 25, 1782.

I make no apology for what I account a duty; I should offend against the cordiality of our former friendship should I send a volume into the world, and

[19] Feb. 16, 1782. [20] To Mr. Unwin, Feb. 24, 1782.

forget how much I am bound to pay my particular respects to your Lordship upon that occasion. When we parted you little thought of hearing from me again; and I as little that I should live to write to you, still less that I should wait on you in the capacity of an author.

Among the pieces I have the honour to send, there is one for which I must entreat your pardon. I mean that of which your Lordship is the subject. The best excuse I can make is, that it flowed almost spontaneously from the affectionate remembrance of a connexion that did me so much honour.

As to the rest, their merits, if they have any, and their defects, which are probably more than I am aware of, will neither of them escape your notice. But where there is much discernment, there is generally much candour; and I commit myself into your Lordship's hands, with the less anxiety, being well acquainted with yours.

If my first visit, after so long an interval, should prove neither a troublesome nor a dull one, but especially if not altogether an unprofitable one, *omne tuli punctum*.

I have the honour to be, though with very different impressions of some subjects, yet with the same sentiments of affection and esteem as ever, your Lordship's faithful, and most obedient, humble servant,

W. C.

The style of this letter, so different from that in which Cowper addressed his correspondents, shows that, however highly he estimated the importance of

an author, he was fully sensible of what was due to the dignity of his old friend's station. Yet, if the Lord Chancellor had been a stranger, Cowper would never have presumed upon an author's privilege. Time and change had not weakened his affectionate regard for Thurlow; and though some degree of pride may have contributed to keep it alive, as if some honour were reflected upon him by the elevation of one with whom, during so many years, he had lived in familiar intercourse, the prevailing motive was undoubtedly that feeling of kindness which the remembrance of former times produced. He looked for a letter from Thurlow with more anxiety than he expected the opinion of periodical critics, or of the public. "Whether," he says to Mr. Unwin, "I shall receive any answer from his Chancellorship or not, is at present *in ambiguo*, and will probably continue in the same state of ambiguity much longer. He is so busy a man, and at this time, if the papers may be credited, so particularly busy, that I am forced to mortify myself with the thought, that both my book and my letter may be thrown into a corner, as too insignificant for a statesman's notice, and never found till his executor finds them. The affair, however, is neither *ad my libitum* nor his. I have sent him the truth, and the truth which I know he is ignorant of[21]. He that put it into the heart of a certain eastern monarch to amuse himself in sleepless nights with listening to the records of his kingdom, is able to give birth to such another occasion in Lord Thurlow's instance, and

[21] Thurlow was living when Hayley published this letter; and therefore the latter half of this sentence was omitted.

inspire him with a curiosity to know what he has received from a friend he once loved and valued[22]."

Another fortnight elapsed, and in reply to some favourable opinions which Mr. Unwin had communicated, Cowper observes, "Alas, we shall never receive such commendations from him on the woolsack! He has great abilities, but no religion. Mr. Hill told him some time since, that I was going to publish; to which piece of information, so far as I can learn, he returned no answer, for Mr. Hill has not reported any to me. He had afterwards an opportunity to converse with him in private, but my poor authorship was not so much as mentioned; whence I learn two lessons; first, that however important I may be in my own eyes, I am very insignificant in his; and, secondly, that I am never likely to receive any acknowledgement of the favour I have conferred upon his lordship, either under his own hand, or by the means of a third person; and, consequently, that our intercourse has ceased for ever, for I shall not have such another opportunity to revive it[23]."

Cowper had sent his volume to Colman also, one of the few surviving members of their Club. Thornton was dead; he died at the age of forty-four, having been married only four years, and leaving a widow and three children. His death was a great loss to literature, as well as to his family and friends. Notwithstanding the change which had taken place in Cowper's views and in his way of life, the feelings of old intimacy were not dead in him; and believing that they were only dormant in others, he expected that they would be awakened

[22] March 18. [23] April 1.

in Colman, who, next to Hill, seems to have had a higher place in his affections than any other member of the Club. But Colman, like Thurlow, never thanked him for his book; and their silence was an incivility as well as an unkindness, which Cowper's nature was too sensitive to bear, without giving some vent to his wounded feelings. At first he had made those excuses for them, which a man readily devises when he fears to find a friend in fault; but when month after month had passed away, and it could no longer be doubted that he was neglected by both, he poured forth some indignant verses, which he sent to his friend Unwin, laying him under no other injunction concerning them, except that they were not for the press. "The unkind behaviour of our acquaintance," said he, "though it is possible that in some instances it may not much affect our happiness, nor engross many of our thoughts, will sometimes obtrude itself upon us with a degree of importunity not easily resisted; and then, perhaps, though almost insensible of it before, we feel more than the occasion will justify. In such a moment it was that I conceived this poem, and gave loose to a degree of resentment, which, perhaps, I ought not to have indulged, but which, in a cooler hour, I cannot altogether condemn. My former intimacy with the two characters was such, that I could not but feel myself provoked by the neglect with which they both treated me on a late occasion. So much by way of preface[21]."

The poem itself is one of those pieces which may more properly be inserted in the biography of an author, than placed among his works, were it only for

[21] Nov. 10, 1783.

this cause, that they are read to more advantage when the circumstances which gave birth to them are fully understood, and fresh in the reader's mind. The latter half only was published by Hayley; there is now no reason for suppressing the former.

THE VALEDICTION.

Farewell, false hearts! whose best affections fail,
Like shallow brooks which summer suns exhale;
Forgetful of the man whom once ye chose,
Cold in his cause, and careless of his woes;
I bid you both a long and last adieu!
Cold in my turn, and unconcern'd like you.

First farewell Niger! whom, now duly proved,
I disregard as much as I have loved.
Your brain well furnished, and your tongue well taught
To press with energy your ardent thought,
Your senatorial dignity of face,
Sound sense, intrepid spirit, manly grace,
Have raised you high as talents can ascend,
Made you a peer, but spoilt you for a friend!
Pretend to all that parts have e'er acquired;
Be great, be feared, be envied, be admired;
To fame as lasting as the earth pretend,
But not hereafter to the name of friend!
I sent you verse, and, as your lordship knows,
Back'd with a modest sheet of humble prose;
Not to recall a promise to your mind,
Fulfill'd with ease had you been so inclined,
But to comply with feelings, and to give
Proof of an old affection still alive.
Your sullen silence serves at least to tell
Your alter'd heart; and so, my lord, farewell!

Next, busy actor on a meaner stage,
Amusement-monger of a trifling age,
Illustrious histrionic patentee,
Terentius, once my friend, farewell to thee!

In thee some virtuous qualities combine,
To fit thee for a nobler post than thine,
Who, born a gentleman, hast stoop'd too low,
To live by buskin, sock, and raree-show.
Thy schoolfellow, and partner of thy plays,
When Nichol swung the birch and twined the bays,
And having known thee bearded and full grown,
The weekly censor of a laughing town,
I thought the volume I presumed to send,
Graced with the name of a long-absent friend,
Might prove a welcome gift, and touch thine heart,
Not hard by nature, in a feeling part.
But thou it seems, (what cannot grandeur do,
Though but a dream!) art grown disdainful too;
And strutting in thy school of queens and kings,
Who fret their hour and are forgotten things,
Hast caught the cold distemper of the day,
And, like his lordship, cast thy friend away.

Oh friendship! cordial of the human breast!
So little felt, so fervently professed!
Thy blossoms deck our unsuspecting years;
The promise of delicious fruit appears:
We hug the hopes of constancy and truth,
Such is the folly of our dreaming youth;
But soon, alas! detect the rash mistake
That sanguine inexperience loves to make;
And view with tears the' expected harvest lost,
Decay'd by time, or wither'd by a frost.
Whoever undertakes a friend's great part
Should be renew'd in nature, pure in heart,
Prepared for martyrdom, and strong to prove
A thousand ways the force of genuine love.
He may be call'd to give up health and gain,
To' exchange content for trouble, ease for pain,
To echo sigh for sigh, and groan for groan,
And wet his cheeks with sorrows not his own.
The heart of man, for such a task too frail,
When most relied on, is most sure to fail;

And, summon'd to partake its fellow's woe,
Starts from its office, like a broken bow.

Votaries of business, and of pleasure, prove
Faithless alike in friendship and in love.
Retired from all the circles of the gay,
And all the crowds that bustle life away,
To scenes where competition, envy, strife,
Beget no thunder-clouds to trouble life,
Let me the charge of some good angel find,
One who has known and has escaped mankind;
Polite, yet virtuous, who has brought away
The manners, not the morals, of the day:
With him, perhaps with *her*, (for men have known
No firmer friendships than the fair have shown,)
Let me enjoy, in some unthought-of spot,
All former friends forgiven, and forgot,
Down to the close of life's fast fading scene,
Union of hearts, without a flaw between.
'Tis grace, 'tis bounty, and it calls for praise,
If God give health, that sunshine of our days;
And if he add, a blessing shared by few,
Content of heart, more praises still are due:
But if he grant a friend, that boon possess'd
Indeed is treasure, and crowns all the rest;
And giving one, whose heart is in the skies,
Born from above, and made divinely wise,
He gives, what bankrupt Nature never can,
Whose noblest coin is light and brittle man,
Gold, purer far than Ophir ever knew,
A soul, an image of himself, and therefore true.

"You say you felt my verses," Cowper says in reply to Mr. Unwin's remarks upon them. "I assure you that in this you followed my example, for I felt them first. A man's lordship is nothing to me any further than in connexion with qualities that entitle him to my respect. If he thinks himself privileged by

it, and treats me with neglect, I am his humble servant, and shall never be at a loss to render him an equivalent. I am, however, most angry with the manager. He has published a book since he received mine, and has not vouchsafed to send it me; a requital which good manners, not to say the remembrance of former friendship, ought to have suggested. I will not however belie my knowledge of mankind so much as to seem surprised at treatment which I had abundant reason to expect. To these men with whom I was once intimate, and for many years, I am no longer necessary, no longer convenient, or in any respect an object. They think of me as of the man in the moon; and whether I have a lantern, a dog, and a faggot, or whether I have neither of those desirable accommodations, is to them a matter of perfect indifference. Upon that point we are agreed, our indifference is mutual: and were I to publish again, which is not impossible, I should give them a proof of it [25]."

As a giver of good counsel, Cowper said he wished to please all; but as an author he flattered himself that he was perfectly indifferent to the judgement of all, except the few who were really judicious. He had pleased those persons whom he was most desirous of pleasing; Mrs. Unwin, who saw the poems in their progress; Mr. Newton, by whom they were criticised on the way to the press; and Mr. Unwin, with whom he corresponded as with a friend and brother. Nothing, since the publication of the volume, he said, had given him so much pleasure as *his* favourable opinion. "The circumstance, however, in your letter, which pleased me most, was, that you wrote in high spirits,

[25] Nov. 24, 1783.

and though you said much, suppressed more, lest you should hurt my delicacy. My delicacy is obliged to you; but you observe it is not so squeamish but that after it has feasted upon praise expressed, it can find a comfortable dessert in the contemplation of praise implied. I now feel as if I should be glad to begin another volume; but from the will to the power is a step too wide for me to take at present; and the season of the year brings with it so many avocations into the garden, where I am my own *factotum*, that I have little or no leisure for the quill[26]." An unfavourable account of his book, in the Critical Review, somewhat dejected him, though he considered that those reviewers could not read, without prejudice, a volume replete with opinions and doctrines contrary to their own. But without prejudice on the score of opinions, and without individual ill will, or the envious disposition which not unfrequently produces the same effect, a dull critic or a pert one is generally ready enough to condemn what he wants heart to feel, or understanding to appreciate. This reviewal of Cowper's first volume, is one of those defunct criticisms which deserve to be disinterred and gibbeted for the sake of example.

"These poems are written, as we learn from the title-page, by Mr. Cowper, of the Inner Temple, who seems to be a man of a sober and religious turn of mind, with a benevolent heart, and a serious wish to inculcate the precepts of morality; he is not, however, possessed of any superior abilities, or power of genius, requisite to so arduous an undertaking; his verses are in general weak and languid, and have neither novelty, spirit, or animation to recommend them; that medio-

[26] March 18, 1782.

crity, so severely condemned by Horace, *Non Dii non homines*, &c. pervades the whole; and whilst the author avoids every thing that is ridiculous or contemptible, he, at the same time, never rises to any thing that we can commend or admire. He says what is incontrovertible, and what has already been said over and over, with much gravity, but says nothing new, sprightly, or entertaining; travelling on a plain, level, flat road, with great composure, almost through the whole long and tedious volume, which is little better than a dull sermon, in very indifferent verse, on Truth, the Progress of Error, Charity, and some other grave subjects. If this author had followed the advice given by Caraccioli, and which he has chosen for one of the mottoes prefixed to these poems, he would have clothed his indisputable truths in some becoming *disguise*, and rendered his work much more agreeable. In its present shape we cannot compliment him on its shape or beauty; for, as this bard himself *sweetly* sings,—

> The clear harangue, and cold as it is clear,
> Falls soporific on the listless ear[27]."

[27] Critical Review, April, 1782. The reviewer then quotes fifty lines from Hope, and observes upon them, "All this is very true; but there needs no ghost, nor author, nor poet to tell us what we knew before, unless he could tell it us in a new and better manner." Some of his expressions are noticed as being "coarse, vulgar, and unpoetical;" he is said not to have succeeded in his "attempt to be lively, facetious, and satirical, any more than in the serious and pathetic;" and the sapient critic concludes by saying, that, "after dragging through Mr. Cowper's long moral lectures, his lighter pieces, such as the Lily and the Rose, and the Nightingale and the Glow-worm, afford some relief, as best adapted to his genius."

"He that misses his end," says Dr. Johnson, "will never be as much pleased as he that attains it, even when he can impute no part of his failure to himself." Cowper, however, was more than compensated for this transient mortification, when one of his friends, who had sent the book to Dr. Franklin (then in France), transmitted to him the letter which he had received in return[28]. "The relish," said Franklin, "for reading of poetry had long since left me; but there is something here so new in the manner, so easy and yet so correct in the language, so clear in the expression, yet concise, and so just in the sentiment, that I have read the whole with great pleasure, and some of the pieces more than once." "We may now," said Cowper, "treat the critics as the Archbishop of Toledo treated Gil Blas, when he found fault with one of his sermons. His grace gave him a kick, and said, 'Begone for a jackanapes! and furnish yourself with a better taste, if you know where to find it.'"

In that vein of natural pleasantry which characterises his letters, and especially those to Mr. Unwin, he says to that friend, "Before I had published, I said to myself—you and I, Mr. Cowper, will not concern ourselves much about what the critics may say of our book! But having once sent my wits for a venture, I soon became anxious about the issue, and found that I could not be satisfied with a warm place in my own good graces, unless my friends were pleased with me as much as I pleased myself. Meeting with their approbation, I began to feel the workings of ambition. It is well, said I, that my friends are pleased, but

[28] May 27.

friends are sometimes partial, and mine, I have reason to think, are not altogether free from bias. Methinks I should like to hear a stranger or two speak well of me. I was presently gratified by the approbation of the London Magazine, and the Gentleman's, particularly by that of the former, and by the plaudit of Dr. Franklin. By the way, magazines are publications we have but little respect for, till we ourselves are chronicled in them, and then they assume an importance in our esteem which before we could not allow them. But the Monthly Review, the most formidable of all my judges, is still behind. What will that critical Rhadamanthus say, when my shivering genius shall appear before him? Still he keeps me in hot water, and I must wait another month for his award. Alas! when I wish for a favourable sentence from that quarter (to confess a weakness that I should not confess to all), I feel myself not a little influenced by a tender regard to my reputation here, even among my neighbours at Olney. Here are watchmakers, who themselves are wits, and who at present, perhaps, think me one. Here is a carpenter and a baker, and not to mention others, here is your idol Mr. Teedon, whose smile is fame. All these read the Monthly Review, and all these will set me down for a dunce if those terrible critics should show them the example. But, Oh! wherever else I am accounted dull, dear Mr. Griffiths, let me pass for a genius at Olney[29]!"

Johnson wished Mr. Unwin to review his friend's book in this journal which, by its undisputed authority, was to mark him for honour or dishonour at Olney;

[29] June 12.

and not at Olney alone, but among all that class of readers who received their opinions upon current literature, once a month, ready made. Cowper seconded the solicitation. "Doubt not," said he, "your abilities for the task which Johnson would recommend to you. The reviewers are such fiery Socinians, that they have less charity for a man of my avowed principles, than a Portugueze for a Jew. They may possibly find here and there somewhat to commend, but will undoubtedly reprobate the doctrines, pronounce me a methodist, and, by so doing, probably check the sale of the volume, if not suppress it. Wherein consists your difficulty? Your private judgement once made public, and the world made acquainted with what you think and what you feel while you read me by the fireside, the business is done; I am reviewed, and my book forwarded in its progress by a judicious recommendation. In return, write a book, and I will be your reviewer; thus we may hold up each other to public admiration, and turn our friendship to good account. But, seriously, I think you perfectly qualified for the undertaking; and if you have no other objection to it than what arises from self-distrust, am persuaded you need only make the experiment to confirm yourself[30]."

If Mr. Unwin consented, he kept his own secret. The reviewal, when it appeared, was so judicious, that it might be suspected to be his, if it were not likely that he would have enlarged more upon the merits of a friend whom he loved so dearly. The little that was said was singularly appropriate. "What Pope," it begins, "has remarked of women, may, by a very ap-

[30] April 1, 1782.

plicable parody, be said of the general run of modern poets :—

Most *poets* have no character at all;

being, for the chief part, only echoes of those who have sung before them. For while not only their sentiments and diction are borrowed, but their very modes of thinking as well as versification are copied from the said models, discrimination of character must of course be scarcely perceptible. Confining themselves like packhorses to the same beaten track and uniformity of pace, and like them, too, having their bells from the same shop, they go jingling along in uninterrupted unison with each other. This, however, is not the case with Mr. Cowper; he is a poet *sui generis;* for as his notes are peculiar to himself, he classes not with any known species of bards that have preceded him: his style of composition, as well as his modes of thinking, are entirely his own. The ideas with which his mind seems to have been either endowed by nature, or to have been enriched by learning and reflection, as they lie in no regular order, so are they promiscuously brought forth as they accidentally present themselves. Mr. Cowper's predominant turn of mind, though serious and devotional, is at the same time drily humorous and sarcastic. Hence, his very religion has a smile that is arch, and his sallies of humour an air that is religious; and yet, motley as is the mixture, it is so contrived as to be neither ridiculous nor disgusting. His versification is almost as singular as the materials upon which it is employed. Anxious only to give each image its due prominence and relief, he has wasted no unnecessary attention

on grace or embellishment; his language, therefore, though neither strikingly humorous nor elegant, is plain, forcible, and expressive."

A fair extract from "Retirement" was then produced as "a specimen of this singular writer's manner;" and this was followed by the passage from "Hope" concerning the Greenland[31] Missionaries, as not only marking, it was said, the bias of the writer's mind, but showing also that he can, when he chooses, be elegant and poetical." This was all.

This was fair and discriminating praise, but it was scanty. It saved the author's credit with his neighbours, but was not the sort of commendation by which the sale of the book was likely to be promoted. Cowper said the Monthly Reviewer had satisfied him well enough; and as this was said to Mr. Unwin it would be proof enough that he was not the critic, even if the meagreness of the article had not shown that it came from one who took no interest in the success of the volume. In a letter written about this time to the same friend, he says, "You tell me you have been asked if I am intent upon another volume? I reply: Not at present; not being convinced that I have met with sufficient encouragement. I account myself happy in having pleased a *few*, but am not rich enough to despise the *many*. I do not know what sort of a market my commodity has found; but if a slack one, I

[31] The selection of this passage leads me to suppose that it may have been written by Mr. Latrobe; he was known both to Mr. Newton and Dr. Johnson, and is likely to have been the person to whom the publisher "recommended the book and the business."

must beware how I make a second attempt. My bookseller will not be willing to incur a certain loss; and I can as little afford it[32]."

Month after month elapsed; his friends praised his poems to him, and reported the praise of others, but there came no tidings of the sale. "My dear William," he says to Unwin, "I feel myself sensibly obliged by the interest you take in the success of my productions. Your feelings upon the subject are such as I should have myself, had I an opportunity of calling Johnson aside to make the inquiry you propose. But I am pretty well prepared for the worst, and so long as I have the opinion of a few capable judges in my favour, and am thereby convinced that I have neither disgraced myself nor my subject, shall not feel myself disposed to any extreme anxiety about the sale. To aim with success at the spiritual good of mankind, and to become popular by writing upon scriptural subjects were an unreasonable ambition, even for a poet, to entertain in days like these. Verse may have many charms, but has none powerful enough to conquer the aversion of a dissipated age to such instruction. Ask the question, therefore, boldly, and be not mortified even though he should shake his head and drop his chin; for it is no more than we have reason to expect. We will lay the fault upon the vice of the times, and we will acquit the poet[33]."

But it had become necessary for him to employ himself in composition. In a letter written three years after this time, he says, "When I was writing my first volume, and was but just beginning to emerge from a

[32] Nov. 18, 1781. [33] Aug. 4, 1783.

state of melancholy that had continued some years (from which, by the way, I do not account myself even now delivered), Mrs. Unwin insisted on my relinquishing the pen, apprehending consequences injurious to my health. When ladies *insist*, you know there is an end of the business; obedience on our part becomes necessary; I accordingly obeyed; but having lost my fiddle, I became pensive and unhappy; she therefore restored it to me, convinced of its utility; and from that day to this, I have never ceased to scrape[34]." It had thus been proved by experience, that exercise of mind as well as body was indispensably requisite for his well-being; and experience had also shown how important it was that the subjects upon which he employed himself should not produce in him any degree of passionate excitement.

When Mr. Unwin wrote to Cowper that his wife had been moved both to smiles and tears by his poetry, Cowper replied, "I should do myself much wrong were I to omit mentioning the great complacency with which I read this account. If she had Aristotle by heart, I should not esteem her judgement so highly, were she defective in point of feeling, as I do, and must esteem it, knowing her to have such feelings as Aristotle could not communicate, and as half the readers in the world are destitute of. This it is that makes me set so high a price upon your mother's opinion. She is a critic by nature and not by rule, and has a perception of what is good or bad in composition, that I never knew deceive her; insomuch that when two sorts of expression have pleaded equally for

[34] To Lady Hesketh, Dec. 15, 1785.

the precedence in my own esteem, and I have referred, as in such cases I always did, the decision of the point to her, I never knew her at a loss for a just one[35]."

Were I to say that a poet finds his best advisers among his female friends, it would be speaking from my own experience, and the greatest poet of the age would confirm it by his. But never was any poet more indebted to such friends than Cowper. Had it not been for Mrs. Unwin, he would probably never have appeared in his own person as an author; had it not been for Lady Austen, he would never have been a popular one. The most fortunate incident in his literary life was that which introduced him to this lady. She had now disposed of the lease of her house in London, and had taken up her abode in the vicarage. The door which Mr. Newton had opened from his garden into his friend's again became in use; "and so captivating," says Hayley, "was her society both to Cowper and to Mrs. Unwin, that these intimate neighbours might be almost said to make one family, as it became their custom to dine always together, alternately in the houses of the two ladies."

His letters were now not only expressive of content, but of enjoyment: "I am glad," he says to Mr. Hill, "your health is such that you have nothing more to complain of than may be expected on the down-hill side of life. If mine is better than yours, it is to be attributed, I suppose, principally, to the constant enjoyment of country air and retirement,—the most perfect regularity in matters of eating, drinking, and sleeping,—and a happy emancipation from every thing that wears

[35] March 18, 1782.

the face of business. I lead the life I always wished for; and the single circumstance of dependence excepted (which, between ourselves, is very contrary to my predominant humour and disposition), have no want left broad enough for another wish to stand upon[36]." Another letter describes the way in which his evenings were spent at this time.

TO JOSEPH HILL, ESQ.

MY DEAR FRIEND, Dec. 7, 1782.

At seven o'clock this evening, being the seventh of December, I imagine I see you in your box at the coffee-house. No doubt the waiter, as ingenious and adroit as his predecessors were before him, raises the tea-pot to the ceiling with his right hand, while in his left the tea-cup descending almost to the floor, receives a limpid stream,—limpid in its descent, but no sooner has it reached its destination, than frothing and foaming to the view, it becomes a roaring syllabub. This is the nineteenth winter since I saw you in this situation; and if nineteen more pass over me before I die, I shall still remember a circumstance we have often laughed at.

How different is the complexion of your evenings and mine! yours, spent amid the ceaseless hum that proceeds from the inside of fifty noisy and busy periwigs; mine, by a domestic fireside, in a retreat as silent as retirement can make it; where no noise is made but what we make for our own amusement. For instance, here are two rustics, and your humble servant in company. One of the ladies has been playing on

[36] Nov. 11.

the harpsichord, while I, with the other, have been playing at battledore and shuttlecock. A little dog, in the mean time, howling under the chair of the former, performed, in the vocal way, to admiration. This entertainment over, I began my letter, and having nothing more important to communicate, have given you an account of it. I know you love dearly to be idle, when you can find an opportunity to be so; but as such opportunities are rare with you, I thought it possible that a short description of the idleness I enjoy might give you pleasure. The happiness we cannot call our own, we yet seem to possess, while we sympathise with our friends who can.

"From a scene of the most uninterrupted retirement," he says to Mr. Unwin, "we have passed at once into a state of constant engagement. Not that our society is much multiplied; the addition of an individual has made all this difference. Lady Austen and we pass our days alternately at each other's *chateau*. In the morning I walk with one or other of the ladies, and in the afternoon wind thread. Thus did Hercules, and thus probably did Samson, and thus do I; and were both those heroes living, I should not fear to challenge them to a trial of skill in that business, or doubt to beat them both. As to killing lions and other amusements of that kind, with which they were so delighted, I should be their humble servant and beg to be excused[37]."

For a while Lady Austen's conversation had as happy an effect upon the melancholy spirit of Cowper

[37] Jan. 19, 1783.

as the harp of David upon Saul. Whenever the cloud seemed to be coming over him, her sprightly[38] powers were exerted to dispel it. One afternoon[39], when he appeared more than usually depressed, she told him the story of John Gilpin, which had been told to her in her childhood, and which, in her relation, tickled his fancy as much as it has that of thousands and tens of thousands since, in his. The next morning he said to her that he had been kept awake during the greater part of the night by thinking of the story and laughing at it, and that he had turned it into a ballad. The ballad was sent to Mr. Unwin[40], who said, in reply, that it had made him laugh tears. "As to the famous horseman," Cowper replied, "he and his feats are an inexhaustible source of merriment. At least we find him so; and seldom meet without refreshing ourselves with the recollection of them. You are perfectly at liberty to deal with them as you please. *Auctore tantum anonymo, imprimantur;* and when printed, send me a copy[41]." It was sent accordingly to the Public Advertiser. "I little thought," said Cowper, "when I was writing the history of John Gilpin, that he would appear in print; I intended to laugh and to make two or three others laugh, of whom you were one. But now all the world laugh, at least if they have the same relish for a tale ridiculous in itself, and quaintly told, as we have. Well, they do not always laugh so innocently, and at so small an expense,——for in a world

[38] Hayley, i. 312. [39] Oct. 1782.

[40] This manuscript, in Cowper's beautiful hand, is one of the treasures with which I have been entrusted.

[41] Nov. 4.

like this, abounding with subjects for satire, and with satirical wits to mark them, a laugh that hurts nobody has at least the grace of novelty to recommend it. Swift's darling motto was, *Vive la bagatelle;* a good wish for a philosopher of his complexion, the greater part of whose wisdom, whencesoever it came, most certainly came not from above. *La bagatelle* has no enemy in me, though it has neither so warm a friend nor so able a one, as it had in him. If I trifle, and merely trifle, it is because I am reduced to it by necessity; a melancholy that nothing else so effectually disperses, engages me sometimes in the arduous task of being merry by force. And, strange, as it may seem, the most ludicrous lines I ever wrote have been written in the saddest mood, and but for that saddest mood, perhaps, had never been written at all."

Gilpin did not immediately become glorious, and Cowper, satisfied with amusing himself and his friend, little anticipated what a race of popularity the famous horseman was to run. The ballad was a species of poetry of which he had ever been fond, and to which, he said, more than to any other he should have addicted himself, if graver matters had not called him another way. His only tragic piece of this kind is the Dirge for the Royal George, and he was beholden to Lady Austen, if not for this subject also, for the occasion which induced him to choose it. It was composed to suit an air which she frequently played on the harpsichord; and he thought it a disadvantage that the air obliged him to write in Alexandrines, a measure which he supposed could suit no ear but a French one. In this he was mistaken; and though he in-

tended nothing more than that the subject and the words should be sufficiently accommodated to the music, he pleased himself, and has pleased, and will please, all to whom it has or hereafter shall be recited or sung.

Another, and it is one of the playfullest and most characteristic of his pieces, was in like manner composed to be set and sung by the Sister Anne of those halcyon days. No other woman was ever made the subject of two poems so different, and each so original and perfect in its kind, as the Mary of this ballad.

THE DISTRESSED TRAVELLERS;

OR,

LABOUR IN VAIN[42].

An excellent New Song, to a Tune never sung before.

1.

I sing of a journey to Clifton,
We would have perform'd if we could,
Without cart or barrow to lift on
Poor Mary and me through the mud.
Slee sla slud,
Stuck in the mud,
O it is pretty to wade through a flood!

2.

So away we went, slipping and sliding,
Hop, hop, *a la mode de deux* frogs.
'Tis near as good walking as riding,
When ladies are dress'd in their clogs.

[42] This poem, which was published in the Monthly Magazine for January, 1808, has been overlooked in every edition of Cowper's poems from that time.

Wheels, no doubt,
Go briskly about,
But they clatter and rattle, and make such a rout!

3.

She.

Well! now I protest it is charming;
How finely the weather improves!—
That cloud, though, is rather alarming;
How slowly and stately it moves!

He.

Pshaw! never mind;
'Tis not in the wind;
We are travelling south, and shall leave it behind.

4.

She.

I am glad we are come for an airing,
For folks may be pounded and penn'd,
Until they grow rusty, not caring
To stir half a mile to an end.

He.

The longer we stay,
The longer we may;
It's a folly to think about weather or way.

5.

She.

But now I begin to be frighted:
If I fall, what a way I should roll!
I am glad that the bridge was indicted.—
Stop! stop! I am sunk in a hole!

He.

Nay, never care!
'Tis a common affair;
You'll not be the last that will set a foot there.

6.

SHE.

Let me breathe now a little, and ponder
On what it were better to do,
That terrible lane, I see yonder,
I think we shall never get through!

HE.

So think I;
But, by the bye,
We never shall know, if we never should try.

7.

SHE.

But should we get there, how shall we get home?
What a terrible deal of bad road we have past!
Slipping and sliding; and if we should come
To a difficult stile, I am ruined at last.
Oh this lane!
Now it is plain
That struggling and striving is labour in vain.

8.

HE.

Stick fast there, while I go and look.

SHE.

Don't go away, for fear I should fall!

HE.

I have examined it every nook,
And what you have here is a sample of all.
Come, wheel round;
The dirt we have found,
Would be an estate at a farthing a pound.

9.

Now, Sister Anne, the guitar you must take;
Set it, and sing it, and make it a song.
I have varied the verse for variety sake,
And cut it off short, because it was long.

'Tis hobbling and lame,
Which critics won't blame,
For the sense and the sound, they say, should be the same.

Lady Austen has the honour also of having suggested at this time to Cowper the subject of that work which made him the most popular poet of his age, and raised him to a rank in English poetry from which no revolution of taste can detrude him. She had often urged him to try his powers in blank verse: at last he promised to comply with her request, if she would give him a subject. "Oh," she replied, "you can never be in want of a subject; you can write upon any;—write upon this Sofa[43]!" The answer was made with a woman's readiness, and the capabilities of such a theme were apprehended by Cowper with a poet's quickness of perception.

The Task was begun early[44] in the summer of 1783. He never mentioned it to Mr. Unwin till it was finished,

[43] The Elbow Chair, a Rhapsody, by the Rev. E. Cooper, of Droitwyche, Worcestershire, was published in 1765. The coincidence of the nominal subject of the two poems, and of the manner in which both poets treated it, and of their names also, is very remarkable. I know the one poem only by the account of it in the Monthly Review for October, 1765. "We never," says the Reviewer, "met with a more rhapsodical rhapsody than this of an honest Welsh parson, in praise of his own country: seated in his Elbow Chair, smoking his pipe, and ruminating on love and liberty and rural prospects, on the marriage act, on angling, on churchyards, on hunting, on patriotism, and on the Scotch favourite." The poem is in blank verse, and the specimen which the reviewer has selected will be found in the supplementary notes.

[44] August 3, he writes to Mr. Bull, "The Sofa is ended, but not finished,—a paradox which your natural acumen, sharpened

and ready for the press. The same silence was observed towards Mr. Newton, who visited Olney in the August of that year, for the second time after his removal. Mr. Newton, in writing from that place, says nothing more of him than that he and Mrs. Unwin were pretty well; but the visit had an unfavourable effect upon Cowper, and the next letter to his friend describes the painful influence which his presence had had upon the latent disease.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

MY DEAR FRIEND, Sept. 3, 1783.

I have been lately more dejected and more distressed than usual; more harassed by dreams in the night, and more deeply poisoned by them in the following day. I know not what is portended by an alteration for the worse, after eleven years of misery; but firmly believe that it is not designed as the introduction of a change for the better. You know not what I suffered while you were here, nor was there any need you should. Your friendship for me would have made you in some degree a partaker of my woes; and your share in them would have been increased by your inability to help me. Perhaps, indeed, they took a keener edge from the consideration of your presence. The friend of my heart, the person with whom I had formerly taken sweet counsel, no longer useful to me as a minister, no longer pleasant to me as a Christian,

by habits of logical attention, will enable you to reconcile in a moment. Do not imagine, however, that I lounge over it; on the contrary, I find it severe exercise to mould and fashion it to my mind."

was a spectacle that must necessarily add the bitterness of mortification to the sadness of despair. I now see a long winter before me, and am to get through it as I can. I know the ground, before I tread upon it. It is hollow; it is agitated; it suffers shocks in every direction; it is like the soil of Calabria—all whirlpool and undulation. But I must reel through it; at least, if I be not swallowed up by the way.

Yours,

W. C.

Cowper had given Mr. Newton before his arrival a hint concerning the divisions in his former flock. "Because we have nobody," said he, "to preach the gospel at Olney, Mr. —— waits only for a barn, at present occupied by a strolling company; and the moment they quit it he begins. He is disposed to think the dissatisfied of all denominations may possibly be united under his standard, and that the great work of forming a more extensive and more established interest is reserved for him[45]." Mr. Newton's successor in the cure had previously been his convert from opinions verging close upon the cold region of Socinianism, to a belief in the articles of the church of England, and in the Calvinistic sense wherein Mr. Newton understood them. He afterwards became a distinguished writer among persons of the same persuasion; but he had neither the genius nor the winning manners of his predecessor. Mr. Newton says of him, on this visit, "he is faithful, diligent, and exemplary, but rather of a hurrying spirit. I think if he had more of

[45] Feb. 8, 1783.

my phlegmatic temper, he would make his way better at Olney. He had some ill impressions of the people, and many of them had strong prejudices against him, before they came together. Thus the beginning was not comfortable, and when things are thus, there is usually a too little and a too much on both sides. There are, however, some who love and prize him much; but he is not so generally acceptable as he would wish. Being curate of Weston, though he preaches twice on a Sunday at Olney, yet as three sermons have long been the custom of the town, the people go once to the Dissenters, some of whom spare no pains to set them against both Mr. Scott and the Church[46]."

After his return home, he says, "I was very cordially received at Olney; the heats and animosisies which prevailed when I was there last, seem in a good measure subsided. There are, however, many who have left the Church, and hear among the Dissenters; but I hope they have not left the Lord. Mr. Scott has some, and some of the best, who are affectionately attached to him. Mr. Scott is a good and upright man, and a good preacher, but different ministers have different ways. He met with great prejudices, and some very improper treatment, upon his first coming to Olney. He found several professors who had more leaves than fruit, more talk than grace; his spirit was rather hurt by what he saw amiss, and by what he felt. By what I can learn from those who love him best, he is very faithful and zealous in reproving what is wrong; but an unfavourable impression he has received,

[46] To Mr. Thornton, 23 Aug. 1785.

that the people at large do not like him, gives a sort of edge to his preaching which is not so well suited to conciliate them. The best of the Olney people are an afflicted people, and have been led through great inward conflicts and spiritual distresses, and for want of some experience of the like kind, he cannot so well hit their cases, nor sympathise with them so tenderly as might be wished. He has the best intentions, but his natural temper is rather positive, than gentle and yielding. I was, perhaps, faulty in the other extreme; but they had been so long used to me, that a different mode of treatment does not so well suit them. But still he is an excellent man, he serves the Lord with a single eye, and I hope his difficulties abate, and his usefulness is upon the increase. I trust time, observation, and experience, will under the Lord's gracious teaching, daily soften and ripen his spirit[47]."

Another fire which took place this winter in this poor town, evinced that the restraints both of law and gospel were grievously needed at Olney. Cowper describes the alarm, the confusion, and the consequences in his own inimitable style.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

MY DEAR FRIEND, Nov. 3, 1783.

My time is short, and my opportunity not the most favourable. My letter will consequently be short likewise, and perhaps not very intelligible. I find it no very easy matter to bring my mind into that degree of composure, which is necessary to the arrangement either of words or matter. You will naturally expect

[47] Hoxton, Sept. 8, 1783.

to receive some account of this confusion that I describe, some reason given for it.—On Saturday night, at eleven o'clock, when I had not been in bed five minutes, I was alarmed by a cry of fire, announced by two or three shrill screams upon our staircase. Our servants, who were going to bed, saw it from their windows, and in appearance so near, that they thought our house in danger. I immediately rose, and putting by the curtain, saw sheets of fire rising above the ridge of Mr. Palmer's house, opposite to ours. The deception was such, that I had no doubt it had begun with *him*, but soon found that it was rather farther off. In fact, it was at three places;—in the out-houses belonging to George Griggs, Lucy and Abigail Tyrrel. Having broke out in three different parts, it is supposed to have been maliciously kindled. A tar-barrel and a quantity of tallow made a most tremendous blaze, and the buildings it had seized upon being all thatched, the appearance became every moment more formidable. Providentially, the night was perfectly calm; so calm that candles without lanterns, of which there were multitudes in the street, burnt as steadily as in a house. By four in the morning it was so far reduced, that all danger seemed to be over; but the confusion it had occasioned was almost infinite. Every man who supposed his dwelling-house in jeopardy, emptied it as fast as he could, and conveyed his moveables to the house of some neighbour, supposed to be more secure. Ours, in the space of two hours, was so filled with all sorts of lumber, that we had not even room for a chair by the fireside. George Griggs is the principal sufferer. He gave eighteen guineas, or nearly that sum, to a

woman whom, in his hurry, he mistook for his wife; but the supposed wife walked off with the money, and he will probably never recover it. He has likewise lost forty pounds' worth of wool. London never exhibited a scene of greater depredation, drunkenness, and riot. Every thing was stolen that could be got at, and every drop of liquor drunk that was not guarded. Only one thief has yet been detected; a woman of the name of J——, who was stopped by young Handscomb with an apron full of plunder. He was forced to strike her down, before he could wrest it from her. Could you visit the place, you would see a most striking proof of a Providence interposing to stop the progress of the flames. They had almost reached, that is to say, within six yards of Daniel Raban's wood-pile, in which were fifty pounds' worth of faggots and furze; and exactly there they were extinguished; otherwise, especially if a breath of air had happened to move, all that side of the town must probably have been consumed. After all this dreadful conflagration, we find nothing burnt but the out-houses; and the dwellings to which they belonged have suffered only the damage of being unroofed on that side next the fire. No lives were lost, nor any limbs broken. Mrs. Unwin, whose spirits served her while the hubbub lasted, and the day after, begins to feel the effect of it now. But I hope she will be relieved from it soon, being better this evening than I expected. As for me, I am impregnable to all such assaults. I have nothing, however, but this subject in my mind, and it is in vain that I invite any other into it. Having, therefore,

exhausted this, I finish, assuring you of our united love, and hoping to find myself in a frame of mind more suited to my employment when I write next.

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

MY DEAR FRIEND, Nov. 17, 1783.

The country around is much alarmed with apprehensions of fire. Two have happened, since that of Olney. One at Hitchin, where the damage is said to amount to eleven thousand pounds; and another, at a place not far from Hitchin, of which I have not learnt the name. Letters have been dropped at Bedford, threatening to burn the town; and the inhabitants have been so intimidated, as to have placed a guard in many parts of it, several nights past. Since our conflagration here, we have sent two women and a boy to the justice, for depredation; S—— R——, for stealing a piece of beef, which, in her excuse, she said she intended to take care of. This lady, whom you well remember, escaped for want of evidence; not that evidence was indeed wanting, but our men of Gotham judged it unnecessary to send it. With her went the woman I mentioned before, who, it seems, has made some sort of profession, but upon this occasion allowed herself a latitude of conduct rather inconsistent with it, having filled her apron with wearing-apparel, which she likewise intended to take care of. She would have gone to the county gaol, had William Raban, the baker's son, who prosecuted, insisted upon it; but he

goodnaturedly, though I think weakly, interposed in her favour, and begged her off. The young gentleman who accompanied these fair ones, is the junior son of Molly Boswell. He had stolen some iron work, the property of Griggs, the butcher. Being convicted, he was ordered to be whipped, which operation he underwent at the cart's tail, from the stone-house to the high arch, and back again. He seemed to show great fortitude, but it was all an imposition upon the public. The beadle, who performed it, had filled his left hand with red ochre, through which, after every stroke, he drew the lash of his whip, leaving the appearance of a wound upon the skin, but in reality not hurting him at all. This being perceived by Mr. Constable H——, who followed the beadle, he applied his cane, without any such management or precaution, to the shoulders of the too merciful executioner. The scene immediately became more interesting. The beadle could by no means be prevailed upon to strike hard, which provoked the constable to strike harder; and this double flogging continued, till a lass of Silver-end, pitying the pitiful beadle thus suffering under the hands of the pitiless constable, joined the procession, and placing herself immediately behind the latter, seized him by his capillary club, and pulling him backwards by the same, slapped his face with a most Amazonian fury. This concatenation of events has taken up more of my paper than I intended it should, but I could not forbear to inform you how the beadle threshed the thief, the constable the beadle, and the lady the constable, and how the thief was the only person concerned who suffered nothing. Mr. Teedon

has been here, and is gone again. He came to thank me for some left-off clothes. In answer to our inquiries after his health, he replied that he had a slow fever, which made him take all possible care not to inflame his blood. I admitted his prudence, but in his particular instance, could not very clearly discern the need of it. Pump water will not heat him much; and, to speak a little in his own style, more inebriating fluids are to him, I fancy, not very attainable. He brought us news, the truth of which, however, I do not vouch for, that the town of Bedford was actually on fire yesterday, and the flames not extinguished when the bearer of the tidings left it.

The poor at Olney were miserably poor, and where miserable poverty exists, depravity is as often the consequence as the cause. More than twenty years after this time, the average earnings of women at the lace-pillow was estimated at nearly six shillings a week; in a few extreme cases they had amounted to eight or nine, but the expense of thread amounted to an eighth of the gross value of the lace. From such wages it was scarcely possible, under the most favourable circumstances, to make any provision against evil days; and the employment is an unhealthy one,—as any sedentary employment must be wherein human beings are occupied in summer from six or seven in the morning till dusk, and in winter from daylight till ten or eleven at night. A cry against slavery was raised in Cowper's days; his voice was heard in it; in our own days it has prevailed, and brought about a consummation which was devoutly to be wished; though it were to

be wished also, that the emancipation had been graduated and the negroes better prepared for it. A cry has now been raised against that manufacturing system which in our own country extorts from what is called free labour more than slavish toil: it has gone up to heaven; and no spirit of prophecy is required to foresee that, unless timely and effectual remedies can be applied, it must, in its inevitable consequences, draw vengeance down.

Cowper's heart was as compassionate as it was gentle. He could not see distress without endeavouring to relieve it. "We do what we can," he writes to Mr. Unwin; "but that *can* is little. You have rich friends, are eloquent on all occasions, and know how to be pathetic on a proper one. The winter will be severely felt at Olney by many whose sobriety, industry, and honesty recommend them to charitable notice: and we think we could tell such persons as Mr. Bouverie, or Mr. Smith, half a dozen tales of distress that would find their way into hearts as feeling as theirs. You will do as you see good; and we, in the mean time, shall remain convinced that you will do your best. Lady Austen will no doubt do something, for she has great sensibility and compassion[48]."

The application was successful. In his next letter, Cowper says, "My dear William, on the part of the poor, and on our part, be pleased to make acknowledgments, such as the occasion calls for, to our beneficent friend Mr. Smith[49]. I call him ours because, having experienced his kindness to myself in a former instance, and in the present his disinterested readiness

[48] Nov. 4, 1782. [49] Afterwards Lord Carrington.

to succour the distressed, my ambition will be satisfied with nothing less. He may depend upon the strictest secrecy; no creature shall hear him mentioned either now or hereafter, as the person from whom we have received this bounty. But when I speak of him, or hear him spoken of by others, which sometimes happens, I shall not forget what is due to so rare a character. I wish, and your mother wishes it too, that he could sometimes take us in his way to Nottingham; he will find us happy to receive a person whom we must needs account it an honour to know. We shall exercise our best discretion in the disposal of the money; but in this town, where the Gospel has been preached so many years, where the people have been favoured so long with laborious and conscientious ministers, it is not an easy thing to find those who make no profession of religion at all and are yet proper objects of charity. The profane, are so profane, so drunken, dissolute, and in every respect worthless, that to make them partakers of his bounty would be to abuse it. We promise, however, that none shall touch it but such as are miserably poor, yet at the same time industrious and honest, two characters frequently united here, where the most watchful and unremitting labour will hardly procure them bread. We make none but the cheapest laces, and the price of them is fallen almost to nothing. Thanks are due to yourself likewise, and are hereby accordingly rendered, for waving your claim in behalf of your own parishioners. You are always with them, and they are always, at least some of them, the better for your residence among them. Olney is a populous place, inhabited chiefly by the half-starved and the

ragged of the earth, and it is not possible for our small party and small ability, to extend their operations so far as to be much felt among such numbers. Accept, therefore, your share of their gratitude, and be convinced that when they pray for a blessing upon those who have relieved their wants, He that answers that prayer, and when he answers it, will remember his servant at Stock."

Fifty years have cancelled the obligation of silence which was then imposed, and the good which was done in secret may and ought to be proclaimed now upon the house top. The disposal of Mr. Smith's bounty led to some interchange of letters between him and Cowper. "We corresponded," says the latter, "as long as the occasion required, and then ceased. Charmed with his good sense, politeness, and liberality to the poor, I was indeed ambitious of continuing a correspondence with him, and told him so. Perhaps I had done more prudently had I never proposed it. But warm hearts are not famous for wisdom, and mine was too warm to be very considerate on such an occasion. I have not heard from him since, and have long given up all expectation of it. I know he is too busy a man to have leisure for me, and I ought to have recollected it sooner. He found time to do much good, and to employ us as his agents in doing it, and that might have satisfied me. Though laid under the strictest injunctions of secrecy, both by him, and by you on his behalf, I consider myself as under no obligation to conceal from you the remittances he made. Only, in my turn, I beg leave to request secrecy on your part, because, intimate as you are with him, and highly as

he values you, I cannot yet be sure that the communication would please him, his delicacies on this subject being as singular as his benevolence. He sent forty pounds, twenty at a time. Olney has not had such a friend as this many a day; nor has there been an instance at any time, of a few families so effectually relieved, or so completely encouraged to the pursuit of that honest industry, by which their debts being paid, and the parents and children comfortably clothed, they are now enabled to maintain themselves. Their labour was almost in vain before; but now it answers; it earns them bread, and all their other wants are plentifully supplied."

Notwithstanding the character of the population, and the situation of his house, which was neither pleasant nor convenient, Cowper was strongly attached to the spot. "The very stones in the garden wall," said he, "are my intimate acquaintance. I should miss almost the minutest object, and be disagreeably affected by its removal: and am persuaded that were it possible I could leave this incommodious nook for a twelvemonth, I should return to it again with rapture, and be transported with the sight of objects which to all the world beside would be at least indifferent; some of them, perhaps, such as the ragged thatch and the tottering walls of the neighbouring cottages, disgusting[50]." He had not acknowledged, and perhaps had not felt, a want of society till he became acquainted with Lady Austen; then, indeed, he enjoyed it cordially. But this enjoyment was ere long disturbed, and both Lady Austen and Mrs. Unwin appear to me to

[50] July 27, 1783.

have been wronged by the causes assigned for its disturbance. Lady Austen has been represented as having entertained a hope of marrying Cowper, and Mrs. Unwin as so jealous on that account, that he found it necessary, in consideration of his earlier friend, to break off all connection with the latter one.

That there had ever been an engagement of marriage between Cowper and Mrs. Unwin, has already been contradicted. If any such engagement had been formed, there were no prudential considerations (as has been alleged) to prevent it. They lived together upon their joint incomes, and marriage would have made no difference in their expenditure. Mrs. Unwin was forty-three at the time of her husband's death; hers was a maternal friendship for one who stood in need of maternal care, and as such Cowper regarded it. She was now threescore, and as little likely to be jealous of being supplanted in his affections, as Lady Austen was to form the design of marrying a man in Cowper's peculiar circumstances, which circumstances she was well acquainted with.

They, however, who, in justice to Lady Austen, reject the notion of any matrimonial project on her part, still impute jealousy to Mrs. Unwin, .. jealousy of the ascendancy acquired over Cowper by one who being possessed of great wit and vivacity, both enlivened his spirits and stimulated his genius. Mr. Scott is reported to have said upon the subject, "Who can be surprised that two women should be continually in the society of one man, and quarrel sooner or later with each other?" It was not long before two women

were continually in the society of this very man, and never quarrelled with each other; and Mrs. Unwin, who was one, is thus spoken of by the other: "She is very far from grave; on the contrary she is cheerful and gay, and laughs *de bon cœur* upon the smallest provocation. Amidst all the little puritanical words, which fall from her *de tems en tems*, she seems to have by nature a great fund of gaiety;—great indeed must it have been, not to have been totally overcome by the close confinement in which she has lived, and the anxiety she must have undergone for one whom she certainly loves as well as one human being can love another. I will not say she idolizes him, because that she would think wrong; but she certainly seems to possess the truest regard and affection for this excellent creature, and, as I before said, has, in the most literal sense of those words, no will, or shadow of inclination, but what is *his*. My account of Mrs. Unwin may seem, perhaps, to you, on comparing my letters, contradictory; but when you consider that I began to write at the moment, and at the first moment that I saw her, you will not wonder. Her character developes itself by degrees; and though I might lead you to suppose her grave and melancholy, she is not so by any means. When she speaks upon grave subjects, she does express herself with a puritanical tone, and in puritanical expressions, but on all other subjects she seems to have a great disposition to cheerfulness and mirth; and indeed, had she not, she could not have gone through all she has. I must say, too, that she seems to be very well read in the English poets,

M. Hawk

as appears by several little quotations, which she makes from time to time, and has a true taste for what is excellent in that way. There is something truly affectionate and sincere in her manner. No one can express more heartily than she does, her joy to have me at Olney; and as this must be for his sake, it is an additional proof of her regard and esteem for him[51]."

Mrs. Unwin's faculties were at this time unimpaired; there was no want of cheerfulness or vivacity in her: and she, too, had enlivened the spirits of Cowper, and animated his genius. The causes which broke up their intimacy with Lady Austen, were the same which had formerly suspended it. The fact was thus announced in a letter to Mr. Unwin: "You are going to Bristol. A lady, not long since our very near neighbour, is probably there; she *was* there very lately. If you should chance to fall into her company, remember, if you please, that we found the connexion, on some accounts, an inconvenient one; that we do not wish to renew it; and conduct yourself accordingly. A character with which we spend all our time should be made on purpose for us: too much, or too little of any single ingredient spoils all. In the instance in question, the dissimilitude was too great not

[51] On this extract from a letter of Lady Hesketh's, Mr. Croft observes, that that lady, "having lived much in the world, and amongst the highest circles, was fully competent to discover the characters of others; and it may, therefore, be concluded, that the pleasing description she gave of Mrs. Unwin was a true one; and that her faults would not have escaped the notice of one so well acquainted with human nature."

to be felt continually, and consequently made our intercourse unpleasant. We have reason, however, to believe that she has given up all thoughts of a return to Olney[52]."

The circumstances which rendered this intimacy irksome, and finally dissolved it, Cowper afterwards stated in a letter to Lady Hesketh, wherein, to explain what interruptions had delayed him in the progress of the Task, he thus gives an account of the rise and termination of this memorable friendship. "There came a lady into this country, by name and title, Lady Austen, the widow of the late Sir Robert Austen. At first she lived with her sister, about a mile from Olney; but in few weeks took lodgings at the vicarage here. Between the vicarage and the back of our house are interposed our garden, an orchard, and the garden belonging to the vicarage. She had lived much in France, was very sensible, and had infinite vivacity. She took a great liking to us, and we to her. She had been used to a great deal of company; and we, fearing that she would find such a transition into silent retirement irksome, contrived to give her our agreeable company often. Becoming continually more and more intimate, a practice obtained at length of our dining with each other alternately, every day, Sundays excepted. In order to facilitate our communication, we made doors in the two garden walls[53] abovesaid,

[52] July 12, 1784.

[53] Hayley (i. 306) says that Mr. Newton opened this communication when he occupied the parsonage; and Lady Austen had the advantage of it. I followed his statement, not recol-

by which means we considerably shortened the way from one house to the other; and could meet when we pleased, without entering the town at all; a measure the rather expedient, because the town is abominably dirty, and she kept no carriage. On her first settlement in our neighbourhood, I made it my own particular business, (for at that time I was not employed in writing, having published my first volume, and not begun my second,) to pay my devoirs to her ladyship every morning at eleven. Customs very soon become laws. I began the Task; for she was the lady who gave me the Sofa for a subject. Being once engaged in the work, I began to feel the inconvenience of my morning attendance. We had seldom breakfasted ourselves till ten; and the intervening hour was all the time that I could find in the whole day for writing: and occasionally it would happen that the half of that hour was all that I could secure for the purpose. But there was no remedy. Long usage had made that which at first was optional, a point of good manners, and consequently of necessity, and I was forced to neglect the Task, to attend upon the Muse who had inspired the subject. But she had ill health[54], and before I had quite finished the work was

lecting what is said here. Probably Hayley has made no mistake, and Cowper means that it had been reopened after having long been disused. Minute accuracy was unimportant, and he was writing as succinctly as he could.

[54] Lady Austen died while Hayley's Life of Cowper was in the press. If she had lived to peruse it, she would probably have corrected some of the mistakes upon this subject, into which he had fallen. It appears by the extracts which are

obliged to repair to Bristol. Thus, as I told you, my dear, the cause of the many interruptions that I men-

now before the reader, (and they are not partial extracts, but comprise the whole that is said concerning it,) that the same causes which led to an interruption of her friendship with Cowper, finally dissolved it. Love was out of the question in her case, jealousy equally so in Mrs. Unwin's; and though Cowper had "fallen in friendship" with her at first sight, and addressed complimentary verses to her, these from a man advanced some way on the road from fifty to threescore, were not likely to be mistaken by a woman who knew the world, and was, moreover well acquainted with his peculiar circumstances.

Mr. Knox says, in his correspondence with the late excellent Bishop Jebb*, that he had a severer idea of Lady Austen than he should wish to put into writing for publication, and that he almost suspected she was a very artful woman. When I find myself differing in opinion from Mr. Knox, I distrust my own judgement. But in this instance it appears that his correspondent thought he had judged harshly, and I do not see what object an artful woman could possibly have had in view.

It may be said that Hayley makes jealousy the cause of the separation, and represents Lady Austen as having hoped that Cowper would marry her, and that he derived his information from Lady Austen herself. To this I reply, that the latter part of the statement is merely what Hayley inferred from the former, and the former may thus be explained. Lady Austen exacted attentions which it became inconvenient and irksome to pay,—or, perhaps, in Cowper's morbid state of sensitiveness, he fancied that she exacted them. He is not likely to have stated this so explicitly in his letter to her, as he did to Mr. Unwin and Lady Hesketh. Lady Austen herself may never have suspected it; and by imputing jealousy to Mrs. Unwin, she accounted to herself and to Hayley for what must otherwise have appeared unaccountable to her.

---

* Vol. i. p. 276.

tioned, was removed, and now, except the Bull that I spoke of, we have seldom any company at all. After all that I have said upon this matter, you will not completely understand me, perhaps, unless I account for the remainder of the day. I will add, therefore, that having paid my morning visit, I walked; returning from my walk, I dressed: we then met and dined, and parted not till between ten and eleven at night[55]!"

The Bull, thus playfully mentioned, was the person to whose benevolent attention Mr. Newton had consigned him, on his removal from Olney. *Carissime Taurorum* Cowper sometimes addressed him in his letters. He was indeed a man after his own heart. "You are not acquainted with him," he says to Mr. Unwin, "perhaps it is as well for you that you are not. You would regret still more than you do, that there are so many miles interposed between us. He spends part of the day with us to-morrow. A dissenter, but a liberal one; a man of letters and of genius; a master of a fine imagination, or rather not master of it,—an imagination, which, when he finds himself in the company he loves, and can confide in, runs away with him into such fields of speculation, as amuse and enliven every other imagination that has the happiness to be of the party; at other times he has a tender and delicate sort of melancholy in his disposition, not less agreeable in its way. No men are better qualified for companions in such a world as this, than men of such a temperament. Every scene of life has two sides, a dark and a bright one,

[55] Jan. 16, 1786.

and the mind that has an equal mixture of melancholy and vivacity is best of all qualified for the contemplation of either. He can be lively without levity, and pensive without dejection. Such a man is Mr. Bull. But—he smokes tobacco—nothing is perfect!—

Nihil est ab omni
Parte beatum.

Before Cowper began the Task, Mr. Bull put into his hands Madame Guyon's poetical works, and requested him to translate a few of them, "partly," he says, "to amuse a solitary hour, partly to keep in exercise the genius of this incomparable man." A month's leisure was devoted to them, and they were presented to Mr. Bull to make what use of them he pleased. This friend sometime afterwards suggested that they should be printed[56], Cowper undertook to revise them for this purpose, but various circumstances prevented him from ever carrying the intention into effect. Mr. Bull probably thought that the strain of her poetry would rather sooth his mind than agitate it, and induce a sane state of religious feeling. But perhaps the passages on which Cowper brooded most were those that he could apply, when taken apart from the context, to his own imaginary condition.

My claim to life, though sought with earnest care,
No light within me, or without me shows;
Once I had faith; but now in self-despair
Find my chief cordial, and my best repose.

---

[56] He seems to have contemplated this at first, by the Dedication to his friend, which was sent with the manuscript.

My soul is a forgotten thing; she sinks,
Sinks and is lost, without a wish to rise;
Feels an indifference she abhors, and thinks
Her name erased for ever from the skies[57].

Cowper, however, explained to Mr. Newton how it was that he could treat upon subjects in verse, which he trembled to approach in prose. "There is a difference," said he. "The search after poetical expression, the rhyme, and the numbers, are all affairs of some difficulty; they arrive, indeed, but are not to be attained without study, and engross, perhaps, a larger share of the attention than the subject itself. Persons fond of music will sometimes find pleasure in the tune, when the words afford them none[58]."

From the letter wherein he told Mr. Bull that these translations were finished, it appears that his friend had reasoned with him upon his case; and the answer expresses a miserable assurance of utter desertion. "Both your advice," he says, "and your manner of giving it, are gentle and friendly and like

[57] The extreme freedom of the translation seems to show that he intended a self-application here;

Si vous me demandez ce que je crois de moi,
Je n'en connois aucune chose:
Jadis je vivois par la foi,
C'est dans le rien que je repose.
Un neant malheureux, qui ne demande pas
Qu'on lui fasse changer de place;
Etat pire que le trepas,
Et qui n'attend jamais de grace.

Vol. iii. Cantique 69.

[58] March 19, 1784.

yourself. I thank you for them, and do not refuse your counsel because it is not good, or because I dislike it, but because it is not for me. There is not a man upon earth that might not be the better for it, myself only excepted. Prove to me that I have a right to pray, and I will pray without ceasing; yea, and pray, too, even in "the belly of this hell," compared with which Jonah's was a palace,—a temple of the living God! But let me add, there is no encouragement in the scripture so comprehensive as to include my case, nor any consolation so effectual as to reach it. I do not relate it to you, because you could not believe it; you would agree with me if you could. And yet the sin by which I am excluded from the privileges I once enjoyed, you would account no sin; you would tell me that it was a duty. This is strange; —you will think me mad;—but I am not mad, most noble Festus! I am only in despair; and those powers of mind which I possess, are only permitted to me for my amusement at some times, and to acuminate and enhance my misery at others. I have not even asked a blessing upon my food these ten years, nor do I expect that I shall ever ask it again.—Yet, I love you, and such as you, and determine to enjoy your friendship while I can:—it will not be long; we must soon part for ever[59]."

He seldom touched upon this string in his letters to any one except Mr. Newton. "I am well in body," he says to him, "but with a mind that would wear out a frame of adamant; yet upon my frame, which is not

[59] Oct. 27, 1783.

very robust, its effects are not discernible. Mrs. Unwin is in health[60]!"—"We think of you often, and one of us prays for you; the other will, when he can pray for himself[61]!" Writing in the second week of January, he entered at once upon this dismal strain.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

MY DEAR FRIEND, *Jan.* 13, 1784.

The new year is already old in my account. I am not, indeed, sufficiently second-sighted to be able to boast by anticipation an acquaintance with the events of it yet unborn, but rest convinced that, be they what they may, not one of them comes a messenger of good to me. If even death itself should be of the number, he is no friend of mine. It is an alleviation of the woes even of an unenlightened man, that he can wish for death, and indulge a hope, at least, that in death he shall find deliverance. But, loaded as my life is with despair, I have no such comfort as would result from a supposed probability of better things to come, were it once ended. For, more unhappy than the traveller with whom I set out, pass through what difficulties I may, through whatever dangers and afflictions, I am not a whit the nearer home, unless a dungeon may be called so. This is no very agreeable theme; but in so great a dearth of subjects to write upon, and especially impressed as I am at this moment with a sense of my own condition, I could choose no other. The weather is an exact emblem of my mind in its present state. A thick fog envelopes every thing,

[60] Feb. 24, 1783. [61] Feb. 8.

and at the same time it freezes intensely. You will tell me that this cold gloom will be succeeded by a cheerful spring, and endeavour to encourage me to hope for a spiritual change resembling it;—but it will be lost labour. Nature revives again; but a soul once slain lives no more. The hedge that has been apparently dead, is not so; it will burst into leaf and blossom at the appointed time; but no such time is appointed for the stake that stands in it. It is as dead as it seems, and will prove itself no dissembler. The latter end of next month will complete a period of eleven years in which I have spoke no other language. It is a long time for a man, whose eyes were once opened, to spend in darkness; long enough to make despair an inveterate habit; and such it is in me. My friends, I know, expect that I shall see yet again. They think it necessary to the existence of divine truth, that he who once had possession of it should never finally lose it. I admit the solidity of this reasoning in every case but my own. And why not in my own? For causes which to them it appears madness to allege, but which rest upon my mind with a weight of immoveable conviction. If I am recoverable, why am I thus? why crippled and made useless in the church, just at that time of life, when, my judgement and experience being matured, I might be most useful? why cashiered and turned out of service, till, according to the course of nature, there is not life enough left in me to make amends for the years I have lost; till there is no reasonable hope left that the fruit can ever pay the expense of the fallow? I forestall the answer:—God's

ways are mysterious, and he giveth no account of his matters:—an answer that would serve my purpose as well as theirs that use it. There is a mystery in my destruction, and in time it shall be explained.

Yours,

W. C.

Mr. Newton, for the purpose of discouraging this strain, said to him, that as he conversed upon other subjects than despair, he might write upon others. "Indeed, my friend," Cowper replied, "I am a man of very little conversation upon any subject. From that of despair I abstain as much as possible, for the sake of my company; but I will venture to say that it is never out of my mind one minute in the whole day. I do not mean to say that I am never cheerful. I am often so: always indeed when my nights have been undisturbed for a season. But the effect of such continual listening to the language of a heart hopeless and deserted, is, that I can never give much more than half my attention to what is started by others, and very rarely start any thing myself. My silence, however, and my absence of mind make me sometimes as entertaining as if I had wit. They furnish an occasion for friendly and good natured raillery; they raise a laugh, and I partake of it[62]."

It is consolatory to believe that during this long stage of his malady, Cowper was rarely so miserable as he represented himself to be when speaking of his own case. That no one ought to be pronounced happy before the last scene is over, has been said of old in prose

[62] March 19, 1784.

and in verse, and the common feeling of mankind accords with the saying; for our retrospect of any individual's history is coloured by the fortune of his latter days, as a drama takes its character from the catastrophe. A melancholy sentiment will always for this reason prevail when Cowper is thought of. But though his disease of mind settled at last into the deepest shade, and ended in the very blackness of darkness, it is not less certain that before it reached that point, it allowed him many years of moral and intellectual enjoyment. They who have had most opportunity of observing and studying madness in all its mysterious forms, and in all its stages, know that the same degree of mental suffering is not produced by imaginary causes of distress as by real ones. Violent emotions, and outbreaks of ungovernable anger are at times easily excited, but not anguish of mind, not that abiding grief which eats into the heart. The distress, even when the patient retains, like Cowper, the full use of reason upon all other points, is in this respect like that of a dream,—a dream, indeed, from which the sufferer can neither wake, nor be awakened; but it pierces no deeper, and there seems to be the same dim consciousness of its unreality[63].

After the recurrence of his disease in 1773, his

[63] These remarks are not merely speculative. They are the result of observation, in the case of an old friend, whose intellectual powers were of a very high order, and the type of whose malady at that time very much resembled Cowper's. He resembled him also in this respect, that when in company with persons who were not informed of his condition, no one could descry in him the slightest appearance of a deranged mind.

friends appear to have acted judiciously towards him. So long as Mr. Newton resided at Olney, Mrs. Unwin would act implicitly under his advice, and after his departure her own good sense led her to pursue the same quiet, expectant course. Whether they had perceived or not that Cowper's constitution could not bear devotional excitement was of little consequence while he fancied himself inhibited from all exercises of devotion; and to have reasoned with him upon the single point on which his reason was deranged, would have been to act unreasonably themselves. Argument to a mind thus diseased is of no more avail than food to a sick stomach incapable of retaining it. When Mr. Newton touched on the subject in his letters, it was like feeling his pulse from time to time, and always in a way to encourage an expectation of recovery. Mrs. Unwin, meantime, contented herself with a patient hope, and it is evident that Cowper had some comfort in knowing this hope was confidently and constantly maintained. This comfort he had during those years, when at the worst; and it gained strength as his manner of life became more social.

No man had been more accustomed than he was to that kind of society which brings the intellectual powers into full play. So many youths of distinguished talent were never at any other time contemporaries at Westminster, as in Cowper's days; and when he was removed from that daily and hourly intercourse with his peers to a solicitor's office, it was his fortune there to find in a fellow clerk, one who was not inferior to the ablest of them. Thurlow, whom Sir Egerton Brydges calls "the surly, sarcastic, con-

tradictory, old ruler of the courts," had not then contracted any of the callousness of professional and political life. He was in those days as much disposed to sportiveness as Cowper himself, and brought to it those ready talents, and that force of mind which afterwards commanded the respect of Dr. Johnson. "It is when you come close to a man in conversation," said that great conversationist, "that you discover what his real abilities are; to make a speech in a public assembly is a knack. I honour Thurlow, sir; Thurlow is a fine fellow; he fairly puts his mind to yours." And on another occasion he said, "I would prepare myself for no man in England, but Lord Thurlow. When I am to meet with him, I should wish to know a day before." And when Cowper left the office, and became master of his own time, no where could he have found more lively companions than the members of his own club and their associates. It was after having been "enlivened by the witty sallies of Thornton, Wilkes, Churchill, and Lloyd," that Boswell, who had passed the morning with them, "boldly,"—in his own words, "repaired to Dr. Johnson's chambers, for his first visit, and found the giant in his den."

Yet Cowper, who, during so many years, had mixed with such companions on equal terms, and till a time of life in which habits take so strong a hold that they are not easily cast off, had great capabilities for solitude. He could have been contented in a hermitage, if his mind had been delivered from the one illusion that oppressed it. There was an activity in his disposition, like that of a happy child, who having no playmate, is left to devise amusement for itself. As soon

as he began to recover, his first care had been to seek employment, and this he found in carpentering, in cage-making, in gardening, and in drawing, till he discovered "that writing, and especially poetry, was the best remedy for that distress from which he sought to escape!" Many persons have brought on insanity by indulging in habits which excite its predisposing causes, and after temporary recoveries have induced a fresh access by the same imprudence; but Cowper's admirable self-management during the intervals which it pleased Providence to vouchsafe, is not the least remarkable point in his extraordinary case.

Yet though he could bear shade and retirement, he felt that it was good for him to be sometimes in the sunshine of society; and well understood the value of those aids to cheerfulness which come to us from without, or from a distance. "You do well," said he to Unwin, "to make your letters merry ones, though not very merry yourself, and that both for my sake and your own; for your own sake, because it sometimes happens that by assuming an air of cheerfulness, we become cheerful in reality; and for mine, because I have always more need of a laugh than a cry, being somewhat disposed to melancholy by natural temperament as well as by other causes[64]." It was one of the felicitous incidents of his life that the loss of Lady Austen's society was in some degree immediately supplied by a new acquaintance, which in no long time improved into familiarity, and then ripened into friendship. The Throckmortons had a mansion at Weston. Hitherto Cowper had had no intercourse with the family

[64] May 8, 1781.

during the many years that he had resided at Olney; but he had been favoured with a key of their pleasure grounds; and when a new possessor, whom he remembered a boy, came, on the death of an elder brother, to reside there with his wife, he sent a complimentary card and requested a continuance of the privilege he had enjoyed by the favour of his mother, that lady, on the change of possessors, going to finish her days at Bath[65]. The request was readily granted, and nothing more passed between them for about two years. But even as the lion is proverbially said to be not so fierce as his picture, so a shy man is seldom so shy as his neighbours suppose him to be, when he has once obtained a character for shyness. Deterred by that character from seeking the acquaintance of one whom, in other respects, he already knew how to appreciate, Mr. Throckmorton made no advances till an opportunity offered, in which it might have appeared discourteous not to notice him. Balloons were then the wonder of the day; all the country was invited to see one ascend from Weston, and a special invitation came to Cowper and Mrs. Unwin.

The very feeling in which shyness originates, makes the individual more sensible of any civilities that have an air of sincerity and kindness. "Our reception," says Cowper, "was flattering to a great degree, insomuch

[65] Sir Robert Throckmorton, the head of the family, then in his eighty-fourth year, resided in Oxfordshire. Though a Romanist, he had "done great things to preserve and restore Buckland (his parish) church."—*Nichols's Literary Anecdotes*, vol. iii. p. 700.

Cowper's friend succeeded to the baronetcy in 1791.

that more notice seemed to be taken of us than we could possibly have expected, indeed rather more than any of the other guests; they even seemed anxious to recommend themselves to our regards. We drank chocolate, and were asked to dine, but were engaged[66]."

"It is not possible to conceive a more engaging and agreeable character than the gentleman's, or a more consummate assemblage of all that is called good-nature, complaisance, and innocent cheerfulness than is to be seen in the lady. They have lately received many gross affronts from the people of the place, on account of their religion. We thought it therefore the more necessary to treat them with respect[67]."—"A day or two after, Mrs. Unwin and I walked that way, and were overtaken in a shower. I found a tree, that I thought would shelter us both, a large elm, in a grove that fronts the mansion. Mrs. T. observed us, and running towards us in the rain, insisted on our walking in. He was gone out. We sat chatting with her till the weather cleared up, and then at her instance took a walk with her in the garden. The garden is almost their only walk, and is certainly their only retreat, in which they are not liable to interruption. She offered us a key of it in a manner that made it impossible not to accept it, and said she would send us one: a few days afterwards, in the cool of the evening, we walked that way again. We saw them going toward the house and exchanged bows and curtesies at a distance, but did not join them. In a few minutes, when we had passed the house, and had almost reached the gate that opens out of the park

[66] To Mr. Unwin. [67] To Mr. Newton, May 10, 1784.

into the adjoining field, I heard the iron gate belonging to the court-yard ring, and saw Mr. T. advancing hastily toward us; we made equal haste to meet him, he presented to us the key, which I told him I esteemed a singular favour, and after a few such speeches as are made on such occasions, we parted. This happened about a week ago. I concluded nothing less, than that all this civility and attention was designed, on their part, as a prelude to a nearer acquaintance; but here at present the matter rests. I should like exceedingly to be on an easy footing there, to give a morning call now and then, and to receive one, but nothing more. For though he is one of the most agreeable men I ever saw, I could not wish to visit him in any other way; neither our house, furniture, servants, or income, being such as qualify us to make entertainments; neither would I on any account be introduced to the neighbouring gentry."

The intercourse, however, proceeded farther than Cowper anticipated. He soon found himself a favourite visiter at Weston Hall, and for that reason was a frequent one. Incidents connected with the family led him to compose several of those minor pieces that give so much pleasure in the little circles for which they are designed, and on which the reputation of such a writer stamps a value when they are made current in the world of literature. In the easy intercourse of growing intimacy, Mr. and Mrs. Throckmorton became Mr. and Mrs. Frog, and by that inevitable name have obtained a more lasting remembrance in Cowper's letters than could have been conferred on them by a ducal title.

CHAP. XI.

COWPER AT OLNEY. JOHN GILPIN RENDERED POPULAR BY HENDERSON'S RECITATION. PUBLICATION OF THE TASK. RENEWAL OF INTERCOURSE WITH LADY HESKETH.

THE Task meantime was finished, .. that monument which, though not loftier than the pyramids, will more surely perpetuate its author's name, than those eldest of human works have handed down the history of their founders. It was transcribed in the autumn of 1784, and sent to Mr. Unwin for his perusal. "I know," said Cowper, "you will lose no time in reading it: but I must beg you likewise to lose none in consigning it to Johnson, that if he chooses to print it, it may go to the press immediately; if not, that it may be offered directly to your friend Longman, or any other. Not that I doubt Johnson's acceptance of it, for he will find it more *ad captum populi* than the former[1]."

Unwin's opinion of the work relieved Cowper from some anxiety, and gave him "a good deal of positive pleasure." "I have faith in your judgement," said he, "and an implicit confidence in the sincerity of your approbation. The writing of so long a poem is a serious business, and the author must know little of his own heart who does not in some degree suspect himself of partiality to his own production: and who is he that would not be mortified by the discovery that he had written five thousand lines in vain? If, when you make the offer of my book to Johnson, he should stroke his chin, and look up to the ceiling and cry—

[1] Sept. 11, 1784.

'Humph!'—anticipate him (I beseech you) at once, by saying—'that you know I should be sorry that he should undertake for me to his own disadvantage, or that my volume should be in any degree pressed upon him. I make him the offer merely because I think he would have reason to complain of me, if I did not.'—But that punctilio once satisfied, it is a matter of indifference to me what publisher sends me forth. If Longman should have difficulties, which is the more probable, as I understand from you, that he does not in these cases see with his own eyes, but will consult a brother poet, take no pains to conquer them. The idea of being hawked about, and especially of your being the hawker, is insupportable. Nichols (I have heard) is the most learned printer of the present day. He may be a man of taste as well as learning; and I suppose that you would not want a gentleman usher to introduce you. He prints the Gentleman's Magazine, and may serve us if the others should decline; if not, give yourself no farther trouble about the matter. I may possibly envy authors who can afford to publish at their own expense, and in that case should write no more. But the mortification would not break my heart[2]."

The first offer, however, was accepted. "I am glad for your sake," says Cowper to his friend, "that you succeeded in the first instance, and that the first trouble proved the last. Willing, too, to consider Johnson's readiness to accept a second volume of mine as an argument that at least he was no loser by the former, I collect from it some reasonable hope that the volume in question may not wrong him neither. My imagina-

[2] Oct. 20, 1784.

tion tells me (for I know you interest yourself in the success of my productions) that your heart fluttered when you approached his door, and that it felt itself discharged of a burthen when you came out again[3]."

And now, when the poem was in Johnson's hands, he mentioned it to Mr. Newton; not having done so sooner, he said, because almost to the last he had been doubtful whether he should ever bring it to a conclusion, working often in such distress of mind, as, while it spurred him to the work, at the same time threatened to disqualify him for it. To Mr. Unwin he said, "Mr. Newton will be surprised and, perhaps, not pleased; but I think he cannot complain, for he keeps his own authorly secrets without participating them with me. I do not think myself in the least injured by his reserve; neither should I, if he were to publish a whole library without favouring me with any previous notice of his intentions. In these cases it is no violation of the laws of friendship not to communicate, though there must be a friendship where the communication is made. But many reasons may concur in disposing a writer to keep his work secret, and none of them injurious to his friends. The influence of one I have felt myself, for which none of them would blame me—I mean the desire of surprising agreeably. And if I have denied myself this pleasure in your instance, it was only to give myself a greater, by eradicating from your mind any little weeds of suspicion that might still remain in it, that any man living is dearer to me than yourself. Had not this consideration forced up the lid of my strong-box like a lever, it would have

[3] Nov. 1, 1784.

kept its contents with an invisible closeness to the last; and the first news that either you or any of my friends would have heard of the Task, they would have received from the public papers. But you know now, that, neither as a poet, nor as a man, do I give to any man a precedence in my estimation at your expense[4]."

The jealousy, here foreseen, was felt and expressed. "The moment Mr. Newton knew," says Cowper, "(and I took care that he should learn it first from me) that I had communicated to you what I had concealed from him, and that you were my authorship's go-between with Johnson on this occasion, he sent me a most friendly letter indeed, but one in every line of which I could hear the soft murmurs of something like mortification, that could not be entirely suppressed. It contained nothing, however, that you yourself would have blamed, or that I had not every reason to consider as evidence of his regard to me. He concluded the subject with desiring to know something of my plan, to be favoured with an extract by way of specimen, or (which he should like better still) with wishing me to order Johnson to send him a proof as fast as they were printed off. Determining not to accede to this last request, for many reasons (but especially because I would no more show my poem piecemeal, than I would my house if I had one; the merits of the structure, in either case, being equally liable to suffer by such a partial view of it), I have endeavoured to compromise the difference between us, and to satisfy him without disgracing myself. The

[4] Oct. 30.

proof sheets I have absolutely, though civilly refused: but I have sent him a copy of the arguments of each book, more dilated and circumstantial than those inserted in the work; and to these I have added an extract as he desired; selecting, as most suited to his taste—The view of the restoration of all things—which you recollect to have seen near the end of the last book. I hold it necessary to tell you this, lest, if you should call upon him, he should startle you by discovering a degree of information upon the subject which you could not otherwise know how to reconcile, or to account for[5]."

Mr. Newton appears to have objected to the blank verse in which the Task was written, and to the title of the poem, and to have intimated no favourable expectation of its success. Cowper answered all his objections without deferring to any; and with regard to its fortune with the public, he said, "At any rate, though as little apt to be sanguine as most men, and more prone to fear and despond than to overrate my own productions, I am persuaded that I shall not forfeit any thing by this volume that I gained by the last." To Mr. Unwin he says, "I have had a letter from Mr. Newton that did not please me, and returned an answer to it that possibly may not have pleased him. We shall come together again soon, I suppose, upon as amicable terms as usual; but at present he is in a state of mortification. He would have been pleased had the book passed out of his hands into yours, or even out of yours into his, so that he had previously had opportunity to advise a measure which I pursued without his recommendation, and had seen the poems

[5] Nov. 29, 1784.

in manuscript. But my design was to pay you a whole compliment, and I have done it. If he says more on the subject, I shall speak freely, and perhaps please him less than I have done already[6]."

While the Task was in the press, John Gilpin was gaining a wide reputation for its then unknown author. This lively story, in its newspaper form, came into the hands of Mr. Richard Sharp, well known afterwards in the literary and higher circles of society for his conversational talents, and recently by a volume of Essays and Poems, the careful compositions of his middle age, which he published at the close of a long life. Mr. Sharp was intimately acquainted with Henderson, the great actor of those days, and the only one who has resembled Garrick in versatility of power; his Falstaff, his Benedict, and his Mr. Bayes having been not less finished performances than his Shylock, his Hamlet, and his King John. Henderson was at that time delivering public recitations at Freemason's Hall: "it was my lucky chance," says Mr. Sharp[7], "to

[6] Dec. 18, 1784.

[7] My last communication with Mr. Sharp was upon this subject. Our intercourse, which was thus closed by a communication relating to the literary history of Cowper, commenced nearly forty years before, upon a morning visit to Cowper's publisher, then in the Rules of the King's Bench, under sentence of imprisonment, for having published a pamphlet by Gilbert Wakefield, which had been pronounced a seditious libel. From the commencement of my residence at Keswick (1803) till the close of the war, Mr. Sharp continued his custom of making an annual journey to the Lakes. He was expected here as regularly as the season, and his society was one of the pleasures which the season brought with it.

In his last note to me, he says: "I rejoice that you have

make him acquainted with John Gilpin, and to propose his reading it. Yet, to be honest, I must own that I did not anticipate the prodigious effect of that story, when the public attention was directed to it."

These readings were given in conjunction with Sheridan, son of Swift's immortalized friend, and father of Brinsley Sheridan. The terms of admission were thought high, nevertheless the experiment succeeded, and though it continued only during the Lent of one year, the profits amounted to eight hundred pounds. The room was crowded upon every performance, and this success was attributed much more to John Gilpin than to the serious part of the recitations. Henderson was unrivalled as a reader, and for this reason, that he had neither studied nor formed for himself any system of elocution. He was once addressed, when he descended from the desk, by a person who wriggled up to him, with "Pray, who *did* teach you to read, Mr. Henderson?" "My mother, sir!" was his reply. One who was present at one of these recitations says, that when John Gilpin was delivered, "the whole audience chuckled; and Mrs. Siddons, who sate next to me[8], lifted her unequalled dramatic hands, and

undertaken Cowper's Life. The painful facts are so well known, that you must fairly tell the whole story of his derangement. His poetical character will afford you a choice opportunity of giving your sentiments on the nature of the art, and the value of his departure from the French school, which had exclusive possession of our literature till Percy's Reliques appeared."

[8] For this anecdote I am beholden to an anonymous correspondent, who at the age of eighty-five appears to retain his memory and his cheerfulness in an extraordinary degree.

clapped as heartily as she herself used to be applauded in the same manner." But the effect was not confined to the overflowing audiences at Freemason's Hall. The ballad, which had then become the town talk, was reprinted from the newspaper, wherein it had lain three years dormant. Gilpin, passing at full stretch by the Bell at Edmonton, was to be seen in all print shops. One printseller sold six thousand. What had succeeded so well in London was repeated with inferior ability, but with equal success, on provincial stages, and the ballad became in the highest degree[9] popular before the author's name was known.

The first person who communicated to Cowper the intelligence that "the famous horseman" was affording as much amusement to the public as he had for-

[9] I know not whether any writer has disparaged it, except Henderson's biographer, Mr. John Ireland, who says, with especial reference to John Gilpin, that his friend "raised into reputation some things which seemed to have been gathered to the dull of ancient days; and but for such a renewal, had probably been still covered with the cloak of oblivion."

Some notice, however, this ballad had certainly obtained, before Henderson brought it into vogue. The readings at Freemason's Hall were in 1785, and in the preceding October, Cowper, when writing to Unwin respecting the intended publication of his second volume, says, "I have not been without thoughts of adding John Gilpin at the tail of all. He has made a good deal of noise in the world; and perhaps it may not be amiss to show, that though I write generally with a serious intention, I know how to be occasionally merry. The Critical Reviewers charged me with an attempt at humour. John having been more celebrated upon the score of humour than most pieces that have appeared in modern days, may serve to exonerate me from the imputation."

merly given to the little circles at Olney and Stock, seems to have been Mr. Newton. It called forth the following reply.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

MY DEAR FRIEND, April 22, 1785.

When I received your account of the great celebrity of John Gilpin, I felt myself both flattered and grieved. Being man, and having in my composition all the ingredients of which other men are made, and vanity among the rest, it pleased me to reflect that I was on a sudden become so famous, and that all the world was busy inquiring after me: but the next moment, recollecting my former self, and that thirteen years ago, as harmless as John's history is, I should not then have written it, my spirits sank, and I was ashamed of my success. Your letter was followed the next post by one from Mr. Unwin. You tell me that I am rivalled by Mrs. Bellamy; and he, that I have a competitor for fame, not less formidable, in the Learned Pig. Alas! what is an author's popularity worth, in a world that can suffer a prostitute on one side, and a pig on the other, to eclipse his brightest glories? I am therefore sufficiently humbled by these considerations; and unless I should hereafter be ordained to engross the public attention by means more magnificent than a song, am persuaded that I shall suffer no real detriment by their applause. I have produced many things, under the influence of despair, which hope would not have permitted to spring. But if the soil of that melancholy, in which I have walked so long, has thrown up here and there an unprofitable

fungus, it is well, at least, that it is not chargeable with having brought forth poison. Like you, I see, or think I can see, that Gilpin may have his use. Causes, in appearance trivial, produce often the most beneficial consequences; and perhaps my volumes may now travel to a distance, which, if they had not been ushered into the world by that notable horseman, they would never have reached. Our temper differs somewhat from that of the ancient Jews. They would neither dance nor weep. We indeed weep not, if a man mourn unto us; but I must needs say, that, if he pipe, we seem disposed to dance with the greatest alacrity.

Yours,

W. C.

In a subsequent letter to Mr. Newton, he says, "I should blame nobody, not even my intimate friends, and those who have the most favourable opinion of me, were they to charge the publication of John Gilpin, at the end of so much solemn and serious truth, to the score of the author's vanity: and to suspect that, however sober I may be upon proper occasions, I have yet that itch of popularity that would not suffer me to sink my title to a jest that had been so successful. But the case is not such. When I sent the copy of the *Task* to Johnson, I desired, indeed, Mr. Unwin to ask him the question, whether or not he would choose to make it a part of the volume? This I did merely with a view to promote the sale of it. Johnson answered, "By all means." Some months afterward, he enclosed a note to me in one of my packets, in which he expressed a change of mind, alleging, that to print John

Gilpin would only be to print what had been hackneyed in every magazine, in every shop, and at the corner of every street. I answered, that I desired to be entirely governed by his opinion; and that if he chose to waive it, I should be better pleased with the omission. Nothing more passed between us upon the subject, and I concluded that I should never have the immortal honour of being generally known as the author of John Gilpin. In the last packet, however, down came John, very fairly printed, and equipped for public appearance. The business having taken this turn, I concluded that Johnson had adopted my original thought, that it might prove advantageous to the sale; and as he had had the trouble and expense of printing it, I corrected the copy, and let it pass."

A little impatience Cowper felt at the tardiness of his publisher's proceedings: "that evil report of his indolence," said he, "reaches me from every body that knows him, and is so general, that had I a work, or the publication of one in hand, the expense of which I intended to take the hazard of upon myself, I should be very much afraid to employ him. He who will neglect himself, cannot well be expected to attend to the interests of another[10]." After an interval of some weeks, he says, "I know not what Johnson is about, neither do I now inquire. It will be a month to-morrow since I returned him the last proof. He might, I suppose, have published by this time, without hurrying himself into a fever, or breaking his neck through the violence of his despatch: but having never seen

[10] To Mr. Newton, May, 1785.

the book advertised, I conclude that he has not. Had the Parliament risen at the usual time, he would have been just too late; and though it sits longer than usual, or is likely to do so, I should not wonder if he were too late at last. Dr. Johnson laughs at Savage[11] for charging the still-birth of a poem of his upon the bookseller's delay; yet when Dr. Johnson had a poem of his own to publish, no man ever discovered more anxiety to meet the market. But I have taken thought about it, till I am grown weary of the subject; and at last have placed myself much at my ease upon the cushion of this one resolution, that if ever I have dealings hereafter with my present manager, we will proceed upon other terms[12]."

Cowper had not been discouraged by the reception of his first volume. He told Johnson that he "should

[11] Cowper's memory deceived him here. Johnson does not laugh at Savage; he says that he "easily reconciled himself to mankind, without imputing any defect to his work, by observing that his poem was unluckily published two days after the prorogation of the Parliament, and by consequence at a time when all those who could be expected to regard it were in the hurry of preparing for their departure, or engaged in taking leave of others, upon their dismission from public affairs."

There is no laugh at Savage here: the subject of the poem being "Public Spirit with regard to Public Works," the persons whom he might have expected to regard it were those whom the prorogation dispersed. I know not what instance of anxiety in Johnson Cowper alludes to,—most likely it was upon the publication of Irene; the sale of a play generally ends with its novelty, and any delay in publishing after the first night's representation is especially injurious to a short-lived piece.

[12] June 25, 1780.

watch its success, and determine by the event whether to resume his occupation as an author, or drop it for ever[13]." But to pass the press had been to pass the Rubicon; though no triumph had been obtained by the passage, he took his stand after it as an author. One hope, indeed, which was dearer to him than any dream of being "for ever known," had been disappointed, the hope of recalling himself to the friendly remembrance of his old familiar friends. He has said himself that he "was covetous, if ever man was, of living in the remembrance of absentees whom he highly valued and esteemed[14]. But neither Thurlow nor Colman had "thought it worth while" to thank him for his book; and the latter, though he published one himself after it had been sent him, did not "account it necessary to return the compliment." When the Task appeared, Cowper allowed himself, therefore, "to be a little pleased with an opportunity of showing them that he resented their treatment, and sent the book to neither[15]." But they were no common men; on his part at least it had been no common friendship, and it may evidently be seen that while resenting even angrily their neglect, he loved them both. His anger passed away with the expression of it; the mournful sentiment remained; and he seems to have thought, like Dr. Johnson when he sent his Dictionary into the world, that most of those whom he had once wished to please were lost to him, and in like manner to have dismissed his work "with frigid tranquillity," as if in his gloom of solitude he had little to fear or hope from censure or from praise. That

[13] Oct. 1, 1781. [14] To Mr. Unwin, Aug. 27, 1785.
[15] To Mr. Newton, July 9, 1785.

feeling, darkened by his own distempered melancholy, possessed him when he wrote thus to Mr. Newton:

MY DEAR FRIEND, August 6, 1785.

I found your account of what you experienced in your state of maiden authorship very entertaining, because very natural. I suppose that no man ever made his first sally from the press without a conviction that all eyes and ears would be engaged to attend him; at least, without a thousand anxieties lest they should not. But, however arduous and interesting such an enterprise may be in the first instance, it seems to me that our feelings on the occasion soon become obtuse. I can answer, at least, for one. Mine are by no means what they were when I published my first volume. I am even so indifferent to the matter, that I can truly assert myself guiltless of the very idea of my book sometimes whole days together. God knows that my mind having been occupied more than twelve years in the contemplation of the most distressing subjects, the world, and its opinion of what I write, is become as unimportant to me as the whistling of a bird in a bush. Despair made amusement necessary, and I found poetry the most agreeable amusement. Had I not endeavoured to perform my best, it would not have amused me at all. The mere blotting of so much paper would have been but indifferent sport. God gave me grace also to wish that I might not write in vain. Accordingly, I have mingled much truth with much trifle; and such truths as deserved, at least, to be clad as well and as handsomely as I could clothe them. If the world approve me not, so much the

worse for them, but not for me. I have only endeavoured to serve them, and the loss will be their own. And as to their commendations, if I should chance to win them, I feel myself equally invulnerable there. The view that I have had of myself, for many years, has been so truly humiliating, that I think the praises of all mankind could not hurt me. God knows that I speak my present sense of the matter at least most truly, when I say, that the admiration of creatures like myself seems to me a weapon the least dangerous that my worst enemy could employ against me. I am fortified against it by such solidity of real self-abasement, that I deceive myself most egregiously if I do not heartily despise it. Praise belongeth to God; and I seem to myself to covet it no more than I covet divine honours. Could I assuredly hope that God would at last deliver me, I should have reason to thank him for all that I have suffered, were it only for the sake of this single fruit of my affliction,—that it has taught me how much more contemptible I am in myself than I ever before suspected, and has reduced my former share of self-knowledge (of which at that time I had a tolerable good opinion) to a mere nullity, in comparison with what I have acquired since. Self is a subject of inscrutable misery and mischief, and can never be studied to so much advantage as in the dark: for as the bright beams of the sun seem to impart a beauty to the foulest objects, and can make even a dunghill smile, so the light of God's countenance, vouchsafed to a fallen creature, so sweetens him and softens him for the time, that he seems, both to others and to himself, to have nothing savage or sordid about him. But the

heart is a nest of serpents, and will be such while it continues to beat. If God cover the mouth of that nest with his hand, they are hush and snug; but if he withdraw his hand, the whole family lift up their heads and hiss, and are as active and venomous as ever. This I always professed to believe from the time that I had embraced the truth, but never knew it as I know it now. To what end I have been made to know it as I do, whether for the benefit of others or for my own, or for both, or for neither, will appear hereafter.

The first encouragement which he received was from his old schoolfellow Lord Dartmouth, to whom he had sent the volume. He had read only a part of it; of that part, however, says Cowper, he expresses himself in terms with which my authorship has abundant cause to be satisfied, and adds that the specimen has made him impatient for the whole. He had ordered a copy also to Mr. Bacon, the sculptor, who being a friend of Mr. Newton's, and an admirer of his first volume, had made himself known to Cowper by sending him a print of Lord Chatham's monument. The poet had been greatly pleased with it: "I have most of the monuments in the Abbey by heart," he says, "but I recollect none that ever gave me so much pleasure:" and while this impression was yet warm, he introduced the artist and his work into the Task[16]. Mr. Bacon's reply is one of the few letters to Cowper which have escaped destruction.

---

[16] Bacon there
Gives more than female beauty to a stone,
And Chatham's eloquence to marble lips.—Book I.

After thanking him for the present, he says[17], "I should not have room in my paper for observations on the different places that struck me; this might serve for an excuse, as well as another equally true, that indeed I feared I might sink in your opinion, with respect to my taste. There is a disadvantage attending a reputation somewhat higher than one's deserts, that it puts one upon the stretch, and sometimes upon shifts, to support it. But indeed it is nothing more than the truth when I say, that I am heartily glad your book was written, not only on my own account, but because I trust the best interests of mankind will be promoted by it. There are many that will not read a professedly religious book: the name of a clergyman to a treatise makes them cry out 'priestcraft,' and shut the book immediately. The peculiar phraseology of Christians excites in such persons the idea of Methodism, which includes in it those of enthusiasm and nonsense; so that a bar is raised at the very threshold, which usually prevents their entrance entirely. A writer on whom God has bestowed superior talents, commands their respect and attention; he will meet them on their own ground; he touches the springs of human nature, and sets them about what they so seldom do,—a thinking. This is a great point gained, for we are lost for want of consideration; and while they are detained by the liveliness and strength of the imagery, the beauty of the language and melody of the verse[18], who knows but the sentiment may enter into

[17] July 18, 1785.

[18] Perhaps Mr. Bacon remembered the first stanza in Herbert's Church Porch:

the soul? We pretend not to change the heart, but He who can, has made the use of probable means our duty; and having this single eye, we can never entirely miss our aim. 'If the son of peace be there, our peace shall rest upon them; otherwise it shall return to us again.'

"My dear sir, it is in vain my saying I have often wished to see you in London; if we can believe a poet, you are too much attached to sylvan scenes to venture into the suffocating air I am forced to breathe. In truth, I was obliged to remember it was the language of poetry, for I had in imagination packed up my alls, and reared my cottage in the midst of some fertile valley, on the border of some scarce-penetrable wood. I dreamed that there the weary might be at rest; but awaking, I recollected that I should carry that of which sometimes I think I am most weary, along with me. Alas! it is only in the grave that this wicked heart will cease from troubling!

"Well, I humbly hope that you and I are both placed by the Divine Hand, not only as we shall answer his great design, (for that all creatures must do,) but as our present situations shall best advance our final felicity. Our present happiness depends upon such an extensive concurrence of circumstances, as makes it absolutely beyond the calculation of mortals;

Thou whose sweet youth and early hopes enhance
Thy rate and price, and mark thee for a treasure;
Hearken unto a verser, who may chance
Rhyme thee to good, and make a bait of pleasure.
A verse may find him who a sermon flies,
And turn delight into a sacrifice.

but when we consider ourselves as in a state of discipline for another mode of existence, the question is involved in twofold darkness.

"I have rambled so much as to have left myself scarce room to thank you for the kind partiality with which you have mentioned my name in your book. What you said, I was very near believing, for I wished it true; and I could almost forgive myself for being pleased with it. If I am censured, I will throw it upon the verse: perhaps I should blush to have as much said of me in prose. Indeed it was so well said, it is most likely to be fiction, which, according to Waller, the Muses most delight in.

"You will easily perceive I have wrote what comes uppermost. I confide in your candour, and to the feelings of my heart, which cannot have dictated any thing incompatible with that sincere respect and esteem with which I am, dear sir,

Your obliged and obedient servant,

J. BACON.

In this letter[19] Mr. Bacon touched upon one of those causes to which the immediate popularity that the publication of the Task obtained for its author may be ascribed. The most impassioned and imaginative of our devotional writers has pronounced a severe but well-founded condemnation upon the generality of our books of devotion, saying, that they are, in a large degree, the occasion of that great indevotion which prevails among nominal Christians. They administer

[19] This letter is one of the valuable communications for which the Editor and the public are obliged to Mr. Upcott.

as physic that which never can be willingly taken nor well assimilated unless it be received as food. But never were intellectual delight, and moral instruction, and religious feeling more happily blended than in this poem: never was any purpose more effectually accomplished than that which Cowper proposed to himself in composing it; and the hope which Mr. Bacon expressed was speedily fulfilled.

Undoubtedly John Gilpin led the way to this popularity. Those who remember the effect of Henderson's recitation have attested this: and if Johnson had persisted in his first intention of excluding that ballad from the volume, because it had already been printed in so many forms and dispersed every where through town and country, he would have committed a greater mistake than when he suppressed Mr. Newton's preface. Upon second thoughts he not only admitted it, but specified it in the title page and in the advertisement. Cowper was fully sensible of the service it had rendered him. He says to Mr. Newton, "I know no more than you what kind of a market my book has found; but this I believe, that had not Henderson died, and had it been worth my while to have given him a hundred pounds to have read it in public, it would have been more popular than it is[20]."

The first volume had sold so slowly that it was not thought prudent to publish the Task and its appendants as a second; but the first, with a complete list of its contents, was advertised at the end of the book; and of the many who were induced to read the Task because it was written by the author of John Gilpin,

[20] Dec. 10, 1785.

not a few were led to inquire for the previous volume because it was by the author of the Task. In the second edition, which was called for in the ensuing year, the two volumes were connected as first and second, and in the numerous editions that have succeeded each other they have never been disunited.

Before Cowper could know how the public received his Task, he had the satisfaction of finding that it had passed the more formidable ordeal of his neighbours, and that he was "allowed to be a genius at Olney." "Mr. Teedon," says he, writing to Mr. Unwin, "has just left us. He has read my book, and as if fearful that I had overlooked some of them myself, has pointed out to me all its beauties. I do assure you the man has a very acute discernment, and a taste that I have no fault to find with. I hope that you are of the same opinion[18]." Mr. Bacon's letters, and one from Mr. Barham, he mentioned as being very flattering; "such," said he, "as might make a lean poet plump, and an humble poet proud; but being myself neither lean nor humble, I know of no other effect they had than that they pleased me; and I communicate the intelligence to you not without an assured hope that you will be pleased also." Thanking the same friend a little while afterwards for some facetious engravings of John Gilpin, he says, "a serious poem is like a swan, it flies heavily, and never far; but a jest has the wings of a swallow that never tire, and that carry it into every nook and corner. I am perfectly a stranger, however, to the reception that my volume meets with, and I believe in respect of my *nonchalance* upon that sub-

[18] July 27, 1785.

ject, if authors could but copy so fair an example, am a most exemplary character. I must tell you nevertheless, that although the laurels that I gain at Olney will never minister much to my pride, I have acquired some. The Reverend Mr. Scott is my admirer, and thinks my second volume superior to my first. It ought to be so. If we do not improve by practice, then nothing can mend us; and a man has no more cause to be mortified at being told that he has excelled himself, than the elephant had, whose praise it was that he was the greatest elephant in the world, himself excepted[22]." Public opinion however was pronounced upon this volume so speedily that it became popular before the reviews gave their concurrent sentence in its favour. And before Cowper was apprized of its reception it had the happy effect of renewing his correspondence with his relations. It has been said that they neglected him for many years till the Task came out, and that they were then glad to take him up again. Glad to resume the intercourse undoubtedly they were, and proud also, as well they might be. But the neglect had not been exclusively on their side; .. it was reciprocal, easily accountable on both sides; and when accounted for, it is easily to be excused.

In a letter to Mr. Unwin, written at this time[23], Cowper says, "I have had more comfort, far more comfort, in the connexions that I have formed within the last twenty years, than in the more numerous ones that I had before. Memorandum, the latter are almost all Unwins, or Unwinisms."

In this same letter it was that he said he was "covet-

[22] Aug. 27, 1785. [23] Aug. 27.

ous, if ever man was, of living in the remembrance of absentees whom he highly valued and esteemed." It has been seen that he endeavoured, and without success, to recall himself to Thurlow's remembrance and to Colman's; but it does not appear that he made any similar advances towards his relations, dearly as he loved his uncle Ashley, highly as he respected his cousin the General, and much as he was beholden to both. On either part there seems to have existed an uncomfortable feeling. Cowper, though his annual allowance from them had been regularly received, believed[24] at this time that the general had withdrawn his part of it; and he remembered that the last letters from his uncle were in a tone of gentle reproof and prudential admonishment to which he had not thought proper to defer. He supposed that they could regard him only as an unfortunate kinsman, who having disappointed the fair hopes and expectations of his family, had become a burthen upon them,—an object of their compassion, but no longer of their love. They, no doubt on their part, inferred from the strain of his latest communications, and from his conduct, that his malady had only assumed a milder form, and that one effect of it had been to alienate him from all those whom he looked upon as unregenerate. That he did not send them his first volume must have strengthened them in this opinion; and if they looked into it (as they were likely to do) under an impression of this kind, they would perceive there much that tended to confirm it, and might therefore disregard other parts in which his original and happy character appeared

[24] See vol. i. p. 189.

through the cloud. That character manifested itself fully in his second publication; and it was not because Cowper was becoming famous, but because he seemed to have become himself again, that the intercourse between him and his relations was now reopened by the dearest of them, Lady Hesketh.

They who remembered Lady Hesketh in her prime, spoke of her as "a brilliant beauty, who attracted all eyes on her at Ranelagh[25]." No portrait of her has, as yet, been discovered; and it is even more to be regretted that her correspondence with her sister, which might have thrown much light upon some of the most interesting parts of Cowper's history, has not been preserved, and that her letters to Cowper himself have shared the same fate. I cannot but repeat here that, though there is often cause to censure the want of discretion and of delicacy with which posthumous papers have been published, there is more reason to condemn the rashness, or the carelessness and the folly with which they have been destroyed. They whose researches have been among such documents know how imperfect the information is that can be gathered from a one-sided correspondence. Even with regard to individual character it sometimes happens that more may be learnt from the way in which those who are well acquainted with an eminent person wrote to him, than from any thing which transpires in his own letters.

In the best sense of the words, however, no woman can be better known than Lady Hesketh. She had looked upon her cousin almost as a brother, in child-

[25] Letter from Sir Egerton Brydges.

hood and in youth, and many years of absence and intermitted intercourse had in no degree diminished her regard for him. On both sides the latent feeling needed only a touch to call it forth. She had now been seven years a widow; and during the first years of her widowhood, after her return to England, she had been much engaged "with a variety of mournful duties." The last letter[26] that she had received from him was in a strain of that melancholy pietism which casts a gloom over every thing, and which seems at once to chill the intellect and wither the affections. But now she saw that he could once more indulge a playful temper, and sport upon light subjects as he had been wont to do in former days; and after reading John Gilpin her heart told her that a letter from the cousin with whom he used "to giggle and make giggle" would be received and answered with as much warmth and sincerity as it was written with.

How perfectly this expectation was answered, will be seen in his reply.

TO LADY HESKETH.

MY DEAR COUSIN, Oct. 12, 1785.

It is no new thing with you to give pleasure; but I will venture to say, that you do not often give more than you gave me this morning. When I came down to breakfast, and found upon the table a letter franked by my uncle, and when opening that frank I found that it contained a letter from you, I said within myself—"This is just as it should be. We are all grown young again, and the days that I thought I

[26] Vol. i. p. 138.

should see no more, are actually returned." You perceive, therefore, that you judged well when you conjectured, that a line from you would not be disagreeable to me. It could not be otherwise than, as in fact it proved, a most agreeable surprise, for I can truly boast of an affection for you, that neither years, nor interrupted intercourse, have at all abated. I need only recollect how much I valued you once, and with how much cause, immediately to feel a revival of the same value: if that can be said to revive, which at the most has only been dormant for want of employment, but I slander it when I say that it has slept. A thousand times have I recollected a thousand scenes, in which our two selves have formed the whole of the drama, with the greatest pleasure; at times, too, when I had no reason to suppose that I should ever hear from you again. I have laughed with you at the Arabian Nights Entertainment, which afforded us, as you well know, a fund of merriment that deserves never to be forgot. I have walked with you to Netley Abbey, and have scrambled with you over hedges in every direction, and many other feats we have performed together, upon the field of my remembrance, and all within these few years. Should I say within this twelvemonth, I should not transgress the truth. The hours that I have spent with you were among the pleasantest of my former days, and are therefore chronicled in my mind so deeply, as to feel no erasure. Neither do I forget my poor friend, Sir Thomas. I should remember him, indeed, at any rate, on account of his personal kindness to myself; but the last testimony that he gave of his regard for you endears him

to me still more. With his uncommon understanding (for with many peculiarities he had more sense than any of his acquaintance), and with his generous sensibilities, it was hardly possible that he should not distinguish you as he has done. As it was the last, so it was the best proof, that he could give, of a judgement that never deceived him, when he would allow himself leisure to consult it.

You say that you have often heard of me: that puzzles me. I cannot imagine from what quarter, but it is no matter. I must tell you, however, my cousin, that your information has been a little defective. That I am happy in my situation is true; I live, and have lived these twenty years, with Mrs. Unwin, to whose affectionate care of me, during the far greater part of that time, it is, under Providence, owing that I live at all. But I do not account myself happy in having been for thirteen of those years in a state of mind that has made all that care and attention necessary; an attention, and a care, that have injured her health, and which, had she not been uncommonly supported, must have brought her to the grave. But I will pass to another subject; it would be cruel to particularize only to give pain, neither would I by any means give a sable hue to the first letter of a correspondence so unexpectedly renewed.

I am delighted with what you tell me of my uncle's good health. To enjoy any measure of cheerfulness at so late a day is much; but to have that late day enlivened with the vivacity of youth, is much more, and in these postdiluvian times a rarity indeed. Happy, for the most part, are parents who have daughters.

Daughters are not apt to outlive their natural affections, which a son has generally survived, even before his boyish years are expired. I rejoice particularly in my uncle's felicity, who has three female descendants from his little person, who leave him nothing to wish for upon that head.

My dear cousin, dejection of spirits, which, I suppose, may have prevented many a man from becoming an author, made me one. I find constant employment necessary, and therefore take care to be constantly employed. Manual occupations do not engage the mind sufficiently, as I know by experience, having tried many. But composition, especially of verse, absorbs it wholly. I write, therefore, generally three hours in a morning, and in an evening I transcribe. I read also, but less than I write, for I must have bodily exercise, and therefore never pass a day without it.

You ask me where I have been this summer. I answer at Olney. Should you ask me where I spent the last seventeen summers, I should still answer, at Olney. Ay, and the winters also; I have seldom left it, and except when I attended my brother in his last illness, never I believe a fortnight together.

Adieu, my beloved cousin, I shall not always be thus nimble in reply, but shall always have great pleasure in answering you when I can.

Yours, my dear friend, and cousin,

W. C.

In her second letter Lady Hesketh inquired into the state of his income, apprehending that it must needs

be a straightened one, and offering him such assistance as she was able to afford. He replied thus:

TO LADY HESKETH.

MY DEAREST COUSIN, Olney, Nov. 9, 1785.

Whose last most affectionate letter has run in my head ever since I received it, and which I now sit down to answer two days sooner than the post will serve me; I thank you for it, and with a warmth for which I am sure you will give me credit, though I do not spend many words in describing it. I do not seek *new* friends, not being altogether sure that I should find them, but have unspeakable pleasure in being still beloved by an old one. I hope that now our correspondence has suffered its last interruption, and that we shall go down together to the grave, chatting and chirping as merrily as such a scene of things as this will permit.

I am happy that my poems have pleased you. My volume has afforded me no such pleasure at any time, either while I was writing it, or since its publication, as I have derived from yours and my uncle's opinion of it. I make certain allowances for partiality, and for that peculiar quickness of taste, with which you both relish what you like, and after all drawbacks upon those accounts duly made, find myself rich in the measure of your approbation that still remains. But above all, I honour John Gilpin, since it was he who first encouraged you to write. I made him on purpose to laugh at, and he served his purpose well; but I am now in debt to him for a more valuable acquisition than all the laughter in the world amounts

to, the recovery of my intercourse with you, which is to me inestimable. My benevolent and generous cousin, when I was once asked if I wanted any thing, and given delicately to understand that the inquirer was ready to supply all my occasions, I thankfully and civilly, but positively, declined the favour. I neither suffer, nor have suffered, any such inconveniences as I had not much rather endure than come under obligations of that sort to a person comparatively with yourself a stranger to me. But to you I answer otherwise. I know you thoroughly, and the liberality of your disposition, and have that consummate confidence in the sincerity of your wish to serve me, that delivers me from all awkward constraint, and from all fear of trespassing by acceptance. To you, therefore, I reply, yes. Whensoever, and whatsoever, and in what manner-soever you please; and add moreover, that my affection for the giver is such as will increase to me tenfold the satisfaction that I shall have in receiving. It is necessary, however, that I should let you a little into the state of my finances, that you may not suppose them more narrowly circumscribed than they are. Since Mrs. Unwin and I have lived at Olney, we have had but one purse, although during the whole of that time, till lately, her income was nearly double mine. Her revenues indeed are now in some measure reduced, and do not much exceed my own; the worst consequence of this is, that we are forced to deny ourselves some things which hitherto we have been better able to afford, but they are such things as neither life, nor the well-being of life, depend upon. My own income has been better than it is, but when it was best, it

would not have enabled me to live as my connexions demanded that I should, had it not been combined with a better than itself, at least at this end of the kingdom. Of this I had full proof during three months that I spent in lodgings at Huntingdon, in which time by the help of good management, and a clear notion of economical matters, I contrived to spend the income of a twelvemonth. Now, my beloved cousin, you are in possession of the whole case as it stands. Strain no points to your own inconvenience or hurt, for there is no need of it, but indulge yourself in communicating (no matter what) that you can spare without missing it, since by so doing you will be sure to add to the comforts of my life one of the sweetest that I can enjoy—a token and proof of your affection.

I cannot believe but that I should know you, notwithstanding all that time may have done: there is not a feature of your face, could I meet it upon the road, by itself, that I should not instantly recollect. I should say, that is my cousin's nose, or those are her lips and her chin, and no woman upon earth can claim them but herself. As for me, I am a very smart youth of my years; I am not indeed grown gray so much as I am grown bald. No matter: there was more hair in the world than ever had the honour to belong to me; accordingly having found just enough to curl a little at my ears, and to intermix with a little of my own, that still hangs behind, I appear, if you see me in an afternoon, to have a very decent head-dress, not easily distinguished from my natural growth, which being worn with a small bag, and a black riband about my

neck, continues to me the charms of my youth, even on the verge of age. Away with the fear of writing too often!

W. C.

P. S.—That the view I give you of myself may be complete, I add the two following items—That I am in debt to nobody, and that I grow fat.

The happiest stage of Cowper's life commenced when the intercourse with this beloved cousin was thus renewed. He compared himself, in the effect produced upon him, to the traveller described in Pope's Messiah [24], who, as he passes through a sandy desert, starts at the sudden and unexpected sound of a waterfall. And the same volume which was the occasion of restoring to him this blessing, at once placed him at the head of the poets of his age.

[24] The swain in barren deserts with surprise
Sees lilies spring, and sudden verdure rise,
And starts amidst the thirsty wilds to hear
New falls of water murmuring in his ear.

CHAP. XII.

SKETCHES OF THE PROGRESS OF ENGLISH POETRY FROM CHAUCER TO COWPER.

When Dr. Burney, the elder, visited Ferney, in his travels, Voltaire inquired of him what poets we then had in England? and was answered, "we have Mason and Gray." "They write but little," he replied, "and you seem to have no one who lords it over the rest like Dryden, Pope, and Swift." "I told him," says Burney, "it was perhaps one of the inconveniences of periodical journals, however well executed, that they often silenced modest men of genius, while impudent blockheads were impenetrable, and unable to feel the critic's scourge; that Mr. Gray and Mr. Mason had both been illiberally treated by mechanical critics, even in newspapers; and that modesty and love of quiet seemed in these gentlemen to have got the better even of their love of fame[1]."

Voltaire, who lorded it himself over the literature of his own country, was but superficially acquainted with that of any other. Dryden may rather be said to have at one time deserved the supremacy, than ever by general consent to have possessed it; and it was not by his poetry that Swift attained the high station which he must ever hold among English writers. Pope was our first and only dictator. In specifying Gray and Mason as the most eminent of the then

[1] Present State of Music in France and Italy, 1771.

living poets, Dr. Burney spake the just opinion of his contemporaries; but in ascribing so much power to periodical criticism, he was wrong both in the general remark, and in the particular application. Such criticism may do, and has done, much in assisting to corrupt the public taste; but the fear of it never withheld any poet from publishing; nor has its most determined enmity ever succeeded in crushing a poem that deserved to live, nor for any length of time in preventing it from making its way.

When that visit was paid at Ferney, by a good man to the apostle of licentiousness and impiety, Gray was planning and preparing for great works both in prose and verse; and Mason, in the enjoyment of fair preferment properly bestowed, was amusing himself with anonymous satires, and proceeding leisurely with his didactic and later dramatic works. Before Cowper appeared in the field Gray was dead, and Mason seemed to have retired from it. At any time the Task must have been successful, but at no time could the circumstances have been more favourable for its reception. For the revival of that true English taste, which this poem mainly contributed to promote, had already been begun.

The revolution in our fine literature, which took place upon the Restoration, was as great as the political revolutions which preceded, and in their consequences produced it. There is no other example of so sudden a degradation, nor any of so great a one except where it has coincided with the decay and downfall of a state. It was most apparent in the drama, a high department wherein the English had far excelled all modern nations. The last of that

school of dramatists, to whom, far inferior as all, and especially the latter ones, were to their mighty master, no other language has produced any that are either like, or comparable, lived to see a French school introduced in the country of Shakespeare; rhymed tragedies became the fashion of the age; and, which is the worst system of depravation, men of great and indubitable genius took the lead in this and other perversions of the national taste. The blank verse of our old plays is so perfectly in accord with the genius of our language, and so excellently adapted to its purpose, that no greater proof of degenerated taste has ever been given than in this attempt to supersede it by a fashion imported from France, with the French accompaniments of frippery, tinsel, and false sentiment.

During the great rebellion, when the theatres were closed and plays were contraband, such portions of old stock pieces as were most likely to please the populace were exhibited under the appellation of Drolls[2], in taverns, in booths at fairs, or on mountebank stages.

[2] "When the publique theatres were shut up, and the actors forbidden to present us with any of their tragedies because we had enough of that in earnest, and comedies, because the vices of the age were too lively and smartly represented, then all that we could divert ourselves with were these humours, and pieces of plays, which passing under the name of a merry conceited fellow, called Bottom the Weaver, Simpleton the Smith, John Swabbler, or some such title, were only allowed us, and that but by stealth, and under pretence of rope-dancing, or the like."—*Francis Kirkman's Preface to the Wits, or Sport upon Sport*, being a curious collection of several Drolls and Farces, &c. 1673.

Yet it was not so derogatory to Shakespeare that the humours of Bottom the Weaver should thus be vulgarized, as that his noblest works should be accommodated to the temper of the times, not alone by authors who, whatever reputation they enjoyed, were botchers at the best, but by men who, when they committed this sacrilege, could not but be conscious that it was sacrilege they were committing. Shadwell boasted that he had made Timon of Athens into a play; the execution was worthy of the attempt, and the attempt was worthy of Shadwell, whose bust in Westminster Abbey ought to have been cast either in lead or in brass, or in an emblematic amalgama of the two metals. Nahum Tate, who of all my predecessors must have ranked lowest of the laureates,—if he had not succeeded Shadwell,—adapted Coriolanus, Richard the Second, and King Lear to his own notions of dramatic propriety. Shadwell could not degrade himself, for nothing could degrade him; and poor Nahum, whom Dryden invited to assist him in his Absalom and Achitophel, and who was one of the duumvirate appointed to "fit the Psalms to the tunes used in churches," may be excused for fancying that he could fit Shakespeare's tragedies to the stage. But how can we explain or excuse the obliquity of taste and obtuseness of feeling in Dryden, and in Davenant (a poet of a higher grade) when they joined in interpolating the Tempest with their own base inventions?

The change which took place in the drama was in all respects for the worse; in other kinds of poetry it was not at first so entirely bad; yet there was a rapid decline. Imagination and fancy had already been

displaced by conceit and wit: and these in their turn were lowered, till at length the poverty of thought was upon a level with the meagreness of expression. Here Dryden, though the chief of those who debased the drama, is the great and almost the only exception, for Cowley and Butler, as well as Milton, belong to the preceding generation.

It was at one time a received opinion, and Johnson gave it the sanction of his great authority, that Waller and Denham began to refine our versification, and that Dryden perfected it. Before the time of Dryden, he says there was "no poetical diction, no system of words at once refined from the grossness of domestic use, and free from the harshness of terms appropriated to particular arts." "The new versification, as it was called, may be considered," he says, "as owing its establishment to Dryden, from whose time it is apparent that English poetry has had no tendency to relapse to its former savageness." "The veneration with which his name is pronounced by every cultivator of English literature, is paid to him, as he refined the language, improved the sentiments, and tuned the numbers of English poetry." "To him we owe the improvement, perhaps the completion of our metre,—and much of the correctness of our sentiments." But there was no subject of which Johnson, if he knew any thing, knew so little as of our early poetry. The poets before the Restoration were to him what the world before the flood is to historians. He has, however, incidentally observed, that the Elizabethan poets "had attained an art of modulation which was afterwards neglected or forgotten."

Our versification, which was exceedingly complicated in the first ages of our poetry, appears to have been of home growth. We neither inherited nor borrowed any thing from the Welsh, whose system of metre is more intricate than that of any other people. From our Saxon ancestors a scheme of alliterative verse was retained, which became obsolete almost as soon as Piers Ploughman's Visions (one of the most remarkable works in the language) had been composed in it. The extravagant fashion of the Scalds, who strung mythological metaphors into a sort of language which was one continued riddle, had no imitators here; nor has it had any parallel in European literature, except in the short-lived style which Gongora introduced among the Spaniards. But with what care the vernacular poetry was cultivated as an art may be seen in the Metrical Romances, in many of which the stanzas are very graceful, and in others not less curiously elaborate. The first reformation which it underwent was to free it from some gratuitous difficulties, and divest it of the cumbrous ornaments with which it had been overloaded. Chaucer, who is deservedly accounted the Father of English Poetry, effected this. The line of English poets begins with him, as that of English kings with William the Conqueror; and if the change introduced by him was not so great, his title is better. Kings there were before the conquest, and of great and glorious memory too; but the poets before Chaucer are like the heroes before Agamemnon; even of those whose works have escaped oblivion, the names of most have perished.

Father Chaucer, throwing off all trammels, simplified

our verse. Nature had given him the ear and the eye and the imagination of a poet; and his diction was such as that of all great poets has ever been, and ever will be, in all countries,—neither cramped by pedantic rules, nor vitiated by prevailing fashions, nor raised on stilts, nor drooping for want of strength, but rising and falling with the subject, and always suited to it.

The seven-lined stanza of his Troilus and Cresseide[3] was adopted from the Provenceal poets. I know not whether he had any example of the ten-syllable couplet in the poets of France, Provence, and Italy, but the Hermit of Hampole, Richard Rolle, who perhaps himself followed others, had shown him the way in this. That the one form of verse was, in his judgement, as well fitted for grave and lofty subjects as the other, is certain, for in such subjects he has employed them both: but it appears that the couplet took its character in common opinion from his lighter pieces, and was supposed to be adapted for nothing better. And while the "Troilus verse," as King James called it, obtained the dignified title of Rhythm Royal[4], the

[3] Sydney seems to have considered this as his greatest poem. "Chaucer," he says, "undoubtedly did excellently in his Troilus and Cresseide, of whom truly I know not whether to marvel more, either that he in that misty time could see so clearly, or that we in this clear age go so stumblingly after him."—*Defence of Poesy.*

[4] "His metre heroical of Troilus and Cresseid is very grave and stately, keeping the staff of seven and the verse of ten: his other verses of the Canterbury Tales be but riding rhyme, nevertheless very well becoming the matter of that pleasant pilgrimage, in which every man's part is played with much decency."—*Puttenham, Art of English Poesy*, p. 50.

"I had forgotten a notable kind of rhyme called riding rhyme,

strain in which the knight related his tale of Palamon and Arcite, and in which "the story of Cambuscan bold" had been pitched, was degraded in public estimation, and distinguished by the contemptuous term of *riding rhymes*[5].

It is a disputed question whether Chaucer's verses be rhythmical or metrical. I believe them to have been written[6] rhythmically, upon the same principle

and that is such as our master and father, Chaucer, used in his Canterbury Tales, and in divers other delectable and light enterprises. As this riding rhyme serveth most aptly to write a merry tale, so rhythme royal is fittest for a grave discourse." —*Gascoigne's Instructor*, p. 12.

Rithme royal is the seven-lined stanza of Troilus and Creseide. Gascoigne describes it as "a verse of ten syllables, and seven such verses make a staff, whereof the first and third lines do answer, across, in like termination and rhyme; the second, fourth, and fifth do likewise answer each other in terminations; and the two last do combine and shut up the sentence: this hath been called rithme royal, and surely it is a royal kind of verse, serving best for grave discourses."—Ib. p. 10.

James I. in his Reulis and cautelis to be observit and eschewit in Scottis Poesie, says this stanza is called Troilus verse, and that it is to be used "for tragical materis, complaintis, or testamentis."

[5] Perhaps Shakespeare alludes to this appellation when he describes a still more familiar kind of measure, as the "right butterwoman's rate to market." *Sermo pedestris* is an expression analogous to *riding rhyme*.

James I. speaks of the ten syllable couplet as an inferior strain, not to be compared with any kind of stanza,—"ryme," he calls it, "quhilk servis onely for lang historeis, and zit are nocht verse."

[6] For this opinion, which was earnestly impugned by my old schoolfellow, James Boswell the younger, and in which I am supported by Farmer and Dr. Nott (who I think has fully

on which Coleridge composed his beautiful fragment of Christabel,—that the number of *beats*, or accentuated syllables in every line should be the same, although the number of syllables themselves might vary. Verse so composed will often be strictly metrical; and because Chaucer's is frequently so, the argument has been raised that it is always so if it be read properly, according to the intention of the author. But to suppose that it was written as iambic verse, and that the lines were lengthened or shortened to the required measure by sometimes pronouncing a final syllable, and sometimes letting it remain mute, according to

established it), there is the explicit testimony of George Gascoigne, in his Instruction concerning the making of verse in English. He says, "commonly now-a-days in English rhymes (for I dare not call them English verses), we use none other order but a foot of two syllables, whereof the first is depressed or made short, and the second is elevated or made long; and that sound or scanning continueth throughout the verse. We have used in times past other kinds of metres.—Also our father Chaucer hath used the same liberty in feet and measures that the Latinists do use; and whosoever do peruse and well consider his works, he shall find that although his lines are not always of one self same number of syllables, yet being read by one that hath understanding, the longest verse, and that which hath most syllables in it, will fall to the ear correspondent with that which hath fewest syllables in it; and likewise that which hath in it fewest syllables shall be found yet to consist of words that have such natural sound as may seem equal in length to a verse which hath many more syllables of lighter accents. And surely I can lament that we are fallen into such a plain and simple measure of writing, that there is none other foot used but one; whereby our poems may justly be called rithms, and cannot by any right challenge the name of a verse. But since it is so, let us take the good as we find it."—pp. 5, 6.

the occasion, is supposing that Chaucer took greater liberties with the common pronunciation, (which must always be uniform,) and relied more on the judgement of the reader, than one who so perfectly understood the character of his mother tongue, and was so well acquainted with the ordinary capacities of men, can be supposed to have done, without impeachment of his sagacity. Be this as it may, it is no slight proof of that sagacity, that he should have pitched the key and determined the length of verse, which after so many experiments and the lapse of nearly five centuries have been found to accord best with the genius of the language; and that his "riding rhyme," under the more dignified denomination of the "heroic couplet," should be the measure which Dryden and Pope and their followers have preferred to all others for grave and lofty subjects.

The "ornate style," which is the worst fashion that has ever been introduced into English verse, began in Chaucer's time, and he adopted it in some of his smaller and later pieces; perhaps as an experiment towards the improvement of a language then in a state in which experiments might allowably be tried, .. perhaps to gratify some of his friends who admired the new mode: but unless his faculties were impaired by age, of which there is no proof or indication, it is not possible that he could have approved of it himself. His language was what he had learnt in the country, in the city, and in the court; .. what every one could understand, and every one could feel; it was the language of passion and of real life, and therefore the language of poetry: the ornate style was the language of the

cloister; .. it was what any "Latiner" could be taught to write mechanically, without the slightest apprehension that any thing more than versification was required to constitute poetry, and even without ear for that. It was equally pedantic and antipoetical. For more than a century our poetry was overlaid with it. The age after Chaucer was in many respects darker than that which preceded it; his name, however, was held in reverence, and succeeding poets were instructed to look to him as their exemplar, even by those who departed from him most widely in their own practice.

The ornate fashion was suppressed with the monasteries, in which it originated; and a new impulse was given to this branch of literature when Surrey introduced into it the forms as well as the character of Italian poetry. The same thing was done at the same time in Spain by Garcilaso de la Vega, and with the same success, each poet having produced a permanent effect upon the literature of his country. Sir Thomas Wyatt's name is associated with Surrey's in this reformation, and that of Boscan with Garcilaso's. The change in England was greater than in Spain, because metrical versification was here substituted for rhythmical: to Surrey it is that the honour of this improvement must be ascribed; and as Boscan introduced the *verso suelto* into Spanish, Surrey, with better fortune, gave in English the first example of blank verse. It is uncertain whether he derived it from the Italian or the Spanish, or, which is quite as likely, whether the experiment was the result of his own conception: but in no other language has it succeeded so well as in ours,

to which, indeed, it is so excellently adapted, that it might peculiarly be denominated the English metre: in no other could Shakespeare and Milton have found adequate expression for their thoughts.

In those languages wherein any of the earliest specimens of their poetry have been preserved, the verses seem generally to have been short; because, being composed when writing was either unknown or little used, and also being orally transmitted, they were in the first instance more easily endited, and in the second more readily remembered. While the art continued in a rude state, lengthening the line was no improvement; for if four feet were extended to five, it was generally done by the insertion of some useless epithet, .. and if to a greater length, the verse was then divided by a pause, regularly recurring in the same place. From Chaucer's time the line of five feet (whether in couplets or in stanzas) has been the most approved measure, and from Surrey's, the iambic the most approved movement, in all subjects of great pith and moment. In the succeeding age there were many and important exceptions to the use of the measure; .. to that of the movement few or none. The line of fourteen syllables, (which being divided at its usual resting place, is no other than the common ballad metre) was used in translations of the Æneid and the Metamorphoses; but it is remarkable that Chapman[7], who employed it in his version of the Iliad, should have rendered the

[7] In the letter to Sir Robert Howard, prefatory to Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis*, "the old translation of Homer by Chapman," is said to be written "in Alexandrine, or verses of six feet," the heroic metre of the French. This is one instance of Dryden's

Odyssey in couplets. Most of the numerous historical poems were in stanzas, the octave being generally preferred. Drayton, who had written his Barons' Wars in the Troilus metre, changed it for this when he republished the work, saying that Ariosto's stanza was of all others the most complete and best proportioned; for it "both holds the tune clear through to the base of the column, (which is the couplet at the foot,) and closeth not but with a full satisfaction to the ear for so long detention." Drayton wrote well in every metre which he attempted: but what he thus says of the Italian stanza may be more truly said of the English one invented by Spenser, and used by him in one of the noblest works of human genius. And he committed a great error when he fixed upon the Alexandrine as the measure in which to write his Polyolbion; for of all measures it is that which, in our language, admits the least variety.

Neither the diction of Chaucer, nor of Surrey, .. the father and the reformer of our poetry, .. could have been more perfect than it was. It will not be supposed that because Surrey is thus named with Chaucer, he is placed in the same rank with him; for Chaucer stands in the first rank, with Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton; and in variety of power Shakespeare is his only peer. We know not what Surrey might have been; but little as he found leisure for composing during an active life, and that life shortened by one of

inaccuracy when he touches upon the history of his own art: and it is the more remarkable, because Chapman, having translated the Iliad and Odyssey in two different measures, used the Alexandrine in neither.

those legal murders which have left an ineffaceable stain upon the memory of Henry VIII., his writings form an epoch in the history of English poetry. Where a true poetical feeling exists, even though in an inferior degree, the diction will always be that of truth and nature: and it is always otherwise with imitators, and where inclination has been mistaken for power. Corruption of language, therefore, and ephemeral styles are introduced by inferior writers; and in this respect, the course of literature, like that of ecclesiastical history, is marked by a succession of heresies, which have prevailed for a time, and then passed away. When the far-fetched words of the monastic style were banished from our versification, alliteration was brought into use, not as the principle upon which the verse was constructed, but as its chief and indispensable ornament[8]. This abuse of what is only ornamental

[8] After noting that we missed "the right use of the material point of poetry," Sydney says, "now for the outside of it, which is words, or (as I may term it) diction, it is even well worse, so is that honey-flowing matron eloquence apparelled, or rather disguised in a courtezan-like painted affectation; one time with so far-fetched words that many seem monsters, but most seem strangers to any poor Englishman; another time with coursing of a letter, as if they were bound to follow the method of a dictionary."—*Defence of Poesy*.

Puttenham says, it is "nothing commendable" when a "maker takes too much delight to fill his verse with words beginning all with a letter, as an English rhymer that said

> The deadly drops of dark disdain
> Do daily drench my due deserts.

Many of our English makers use it too much, yet we confess it doth not ill, but prettily, become the metre, if ye pass not two

when sparingly and appropriately introduced, became ridiculous, and was laughed out of fashion; but, as in religious sects, they who avoided one error ran into an opposite extreme. A loose and careless versification was sometimes adopted, that the writer might escape the affectation of a stiff and elaborate one; and while men of genius wasted their powers in fantastic conceits, substituting wit for feeling, others, .. who were not inferior in ability, and of better judgement, though the error into which they fell was quite as great, .. lowered the pitch of their poetry to a prosaic strain, as if there had been no medium between a creeping and a stilted style.

Nevertheless, more poems that are worthy of preservation were produced, in the course of half a century, than in any former or any subsequent age of English literature. It was not till toward the latter part of Elizabeth's reign that the noblest productions appeared, and poetry recovered that estimation which, according to the most illustrious of its patrons, it had lost. Sydney complains that, from almost the highest estimation of learning, it had fallen to be the laughing stock of children; "that an art which was embraced," he said, "in all other places, and patronized and prac-

or three words in one verse, and use it not very much; as he that said by way of epithet,

The smoaky sighs, the trickling tears;

and such like: for such composition makes the metre run away smoother, and passeth from the lips with more facility by iteration of a letter than by alteration, which alteration of a letter requires an exchange of ministry and office in the lips, teeth, or palate, and so doth not the iteration."

tised by the great, should find a hard return only in England, was what he thought the very earth lamented, and therefore decked the soil with fewer laurels than it was accustomed." "It necessarily followed," he said, "that base men with servile wits undertook it, who thought it enough if they could be rewarded of the printer." This complaint shows that if poetry had not then obtained that patronage among the great, of which Sydney himself set the example to his contemporaries, it already possessed the more effectual patronage of the public, and had become a marketable article. Poets swarmed[9] in this country, as they did in France and Spain, and a little earlier in Italy, and in Holland a little later. And in our literature, as in our language, we took something from other countries, while they seem to have derived nothing from us.

But the poetry of every nation (more than any other branch of its literature) is coloured by the national character, as the wine of different soils has its raciness. That of the Italians, in that age, was graceful, delicate, fanciful, sometimes imaginative and sublime. With the Spaniards it was stately, solemn, and fantastic, often more full of sound than meaning, yet frequently, both in its grave and in its humorous strains, worthy of a noble people. With the French it was extravagant

[9] Webbe says, in the preface to his Discourse of English Poetry (1586), "Among the innumerable sorts of English books, and infinite fardles of printed pamphlets, wherewith this country is pestered, all shops stuffed, and every study furnished, the greatest part, I think, in any one kind, are such as are either mere poetical, or which tend in some respect (as either in matter or form) to poetry."

and empty; and, in the worst acceptation of the word, licentious, beyond that of any other nation, except at one time the Italians; but in Italy the abomination was checked, while in France it continued in full vogue from generation to generation, till it produced a corruption and dissolution of manners, of which, happily for human nature, no other example has been known in the civilised world. In Holland, it seemed consecrated to patriotism and the household gods; .. the Dutch may be proud of their poets with as good cause as of their painters, their scholars, their seamen, their struggle against the Spaniards, and their country, .. in which art has achieved greater triumphs, and well directed industry has produced more general comfort, than in any other part of Christendom.

Some advantage over the southern nations we derive from our language; with a little practice it would not be difficult for any one who possesses a talent for versifying to compose in it extemporaneous verses of no higher standard than those of the Improvisatore, but it would never be so easy. The northern tongues afford no such facilities as the southern for this kind of display, in which if any man of genius were to waste his powers, he would infallibly injure them. More difficulty requires more care, and where that difficulty arises not from any preposterous fashion, or unreasonable rules, but from the character of the language, it tends to improve the artist. In the Italian, and it is the same case in the Spanish and Portugueze, it is easy to versify, and an octave stanza is soon filled with melodious words; translate it into the same metre, and it will frequently not be possible

in our briefer speech and more compressed vocabulary to fill the stave, without dilating the meaning, or adding to it. With us, too, something more than the mere collocation of words is required to distinguish verse from prose, even when the words themselves are in no degree appropriated to poetry. It is not enough that the ear should be satisfied; something must be addressed to the feelings, the fancy, or the imagination, or something presented to the understanding. That this should be required belongs to the genius of the language and to the national character, differing in this respect from those of the southern nations, and more especially from the French. Of course it must happen that poets will often deceive themselves, and that the public will often be for a while deceived, and false reputations raised. Many pieces have obtained great applause, and some to this day retain it, which could no more endure the test of just criticism, than a bubble can bear the touch.

"There are three ways," Dr. Johnson said, "in which writing may be unnatural;.. by being *bombastic*, and above nature;.. *affected*, and beside it, fringing events with ornaments which nature did not afford;.. or *weak*, and below nature. Neither of the first could please long. The third might, indeed, please a good while, or at least please many, because imbecility, and consequently a love of imbecility, might be found in many[10]." The bombastic immediately invites ridicule, and soon yields to it:.. the last per-

[10] Boswell's Johnson (edition 1835), vol. ix. 309. It is one of the observations recorded by Mr. Windham, who recorded of Johnson nothing but what was worth recording.

sonage upon the stage who spake in the vein of King Cambyses and Tamberlain was Ancient Pistol. The affected style lasts longer; and for the same reason as the feeble. That style of poetry belongs to it which Johnson has called the metaphysical; the designation is not fortunate, but so much respect is due to Johnson, that it would be unbecoming to substitute, even if it were easy to propose, one which might be unexceptionable.

Whether this style spread like a contagion from Italy to Spain and England, or whether it originated in the intellectual temperature of the age, and thus became endemic in the three countries, may be questioned[11]. It was most out of place when applied to devotional poetry, .. upon which every species of false taste seems, at different times, to have fastened. Amatory poems were on the whole improved by it, because it required something more than the common places which were the stock in trade of all mere versifiers. Cowley squandered upon this fashion powers which might have won for him the lasting fame to which he aspired. Butler alone perceived its proper application, and he, in consequence, produced a poem which, in spite of the subject, can never become obsolete while wit and wisdom are understood. With the true tact of genius he adapted his verse to his materials, and creating thus a manner of his own, derived an advantage from

[11] Donne passed some years in Italy and in Spain; he therefore may be supposed to have contracted the fashion in those countries, having "returned into England perfect in their languages."—*Izaak Walton.*

one of the causes which had concurred to deteriorate our versification.

Many persons possess a musical ear who have no voice for singing, but a good voice is seldom found where there is not also an ear which is capable of directing it. The case is different in poetry; the poetical feeling sometimes exists, and in a high degree, without the talent for versifying; but the talent very commonly, without a spark of the feeling. Both Donne and Ben Jonson, the two authors by whom the metaphysical poetry was brought into vogue, were rugged versifyers. It was not, however, altogether owing to the influence of their example that the poems of this class were very generally characterised by a rough and careless versification. Their authority, indeed, afforded a sanction, of which inferior writers would willingly avail themselves; but the fact resulted from the nature of such poetry. The poet found difficulty enough in rendering his far-fetched and elaborate conceits intelligible; and cramp thoughts formed for themselves cramp expressions and disjointed verse.

There was another incidental cause, less obvious, but not less certain in its effect. An attempt had been made to introduce the Latin metres into English poetry; not upon a principle of adaptation (which has since so perfectly succeeded among the Germans), but in strict conformance to the rules of Latin prosody; and as those rules frequently reversed the common pronunciation, the attempt was necessarily unsuccessful. Yet earnest endeavours were made for bringing it into use, by men of great ability and great influence; and though

it never obtained any degree of public acceptance, yet specimens enough of it were published to have the effect of vilifying the art. For in this new versification nothing could be too bald and beggarly in expression, nothing too harsh in construction, nothing too inharmonious, provided it were forced into the prescribed form of verse; and the license which the metrifiers took in this respect, infected other poets, though not in an equal degree.

The resemblance between fashions in literature and heresies in religion, holds good in several points; most of them, in both cases, as they passed away, left something behind them; but there is this difference, that the Romish church generally incorporated some of the errors and corruptions which it had opposed, while in literature nothing was ever retained except the little that was good. This resemblance also may be observed, that as many sects have originated in regarding some isolated point of doctrine, distorting it, mistaking its relations, and exaggerating its importance, so fashions in fine literature have been devised with the intent of supplying some real or supposed defect; and in both cases the spirit of antagonism has generally given rise to an opposite error. Thus, in the same age when Drayton produced his elaborate but monotonous poem, and the "silver-tongued" Sylvester poured forth his full and mellifluous couplets with a sonorous volubility which has rarely been equalled or approached, Browne, and Sandys, and May composed in rhyme with the freedom of blank verse, but without the force; Wither's pedestrian strain was only to be distinguished from prose by its rhymes; and Chamberlaine,

though his Pharonnida was pitched in a higher key, rhymed upon any word, however insignificant, that came in his way. All these were men of great poetical talent, some of them, indeed, of undoubted genius, capable of seducing others by their example. But in the same age, just as heresies have had the effect of causing true doctrines to be more strictly defined, Sir John Davies and Sir William Davenant, avoiding equally the opposite faults of too artificial and too careless a style, wrote in numbers which, for precision, and clearness, and felicity, and strength, have never been surpassed.

That Sir John Denham began a reformation in our verse, is one of the most groundless assertions that ever obtained belief in literature. More thought and more skill had been exercised before his time in the construction of English metre, than he ever bestowed upon the subject, and by men of far greater attainments and far higher powers. To improve, indeed, either upon the versification or the diction of our great writers, was impossible; it was impossible to exceed them in the knowledge or in the practice of their art, but it was easy to avoid the more obvious faults of inferior authors; and in this he succeeded, just so far, as not to be included in

> The mob of gentlemen who wrote with ease;

nor consigned to oblivion with the "Persons of Quality" who contributed their vapid effusions to the miscellanies of those days. His proper place is among those of his contemporaries and successors who called themselves Wits, and have since been entitled Poets

by the courtesy of England. And as Denham has no claim to the praise which has been awarded him on this ground, Waller, to whom a larger portion has been assigned, deserves it little more. No one who, in attempting to write poetry, considered it as any thing more than an amusement for leisure hours, has ever derived improvement in the art from the writings of either.

Dryden has indeed delivered a contrary opinion in favour of both these minor poets. But Dryden was not well read in his own art; and moreover, he often allowed his critical judgement to be biassed by motives of temporary convenience. His enemies wronged him when they asserted that he had been influenced by no better motives in declaring himself a convert to the Romish church. That corrupt church, whose system is the greatest work of human wisdom and human wickedness, ever has found, and ever will find, converts among those who require narcotics either for the understanding or the conscience. I know not that Dryden ever regarded the licentiousness of his dramatic works as a sin to be repented of; nor does it appear in his writings that a state of doubt upon the most momentous subjects occasioned in him any of that uneasiness, and of those aspirations after the blessings of full faith, which are so strongly indicated in the works of his friend Davenant. His conversion appears to have been less an affair of the feelings than of the intellect, and that intellect not a comprehensive one. In his age, as in ours, the foundations on which alone the peace of individuals, as well as the security of states can rest, had been shaken. He saw the evils of

fanaticism, and of religious factions at home; and he had not seen abroad the abominations consequent upon and inseparably connected with a system of established imposture. By inclination he was a sceptic[12], by habit a conformist, professing obedience to authority as a sure and safe principle whereon to rest. But he was willing to make a merit of this obedience, and saved the pride of his philosophy by pleading that, as he believed the fundamental mysteries of revealed religion, he was bound in consequence to believe also all that the Romish church had superadded[13]. The very weakness of the argument is proof of his sincerity; for in matters of criticism, when he was reasoning against his own better judgement, that sort of

[12] "Being naturally inclined," he says, "to scepticism in philosophy, I have no reason to impose my opinions in a subject which is above it; but whatever they are, I submit them with all reverence to my mother church, accounting them no farther mine, than as they are authorised, or at least uncondemned, by her."

This was said in the preface to his Religio Laici, while he was yet a member of the Church of England.

[13] To take up half on trust, and half to try,
Name it not faith, but bungling bigotry.
Both knave and fool the merchant we may call,
To pay great sums and to compound the small:
For who would break with Heaven, and would not break for all?
Hind and Panther.

This argument comes to the vulgar saying, "In for a penny, in for a pound," which holds good only of risks and expenses rashly or inevitably incurred. If so base a metaphor may be allowed upon such a subject, the real state of the case is explained by saying, we pay the penny because it is a just debt, but we refuse to be swindled out of the pound.

ability which makes the worse appear the better reason, was never wanting in him. He was too skilful and too sagacious ever to have advanced what was palpably fallacious, unless he had imposed upon himself by it.

But Dryden is not entitled to the same credit for sincerity in the opinions which he delivered upon poetry. He seems to have been the first eminent author in this country who practised literature as a profession, and regarding it exclusively as such, gave up his mind to temporary subjects, and contented himself with obtaining immediate profit by the easiest means. Adulation was so common in his days, that probably he never thought himself degraded by using it; and one who offered this kind of incense without scruple, would not hesitate, among the ways of flattery, to adopt the opinions of those whom he wished to propitiate, however repugnant to his own better judgement. After telling the Marquis of Newcastle that the piece which he then dedicated to him "pretended to be nothing more than a foil to his lordship's composition;" and calling that truly noble personage, in all other respects, "the most noble poet of his age and nation;" no wonder can be felt when he asserts that his contemporaries might "justly claim precedence of Shakespeare in heroic plays," .. that "Shakespeare's whole style is so packed with figurative expressions, that it is as affected as it is obscure," .. that "well placing of words, for the sweetness of pronunciation, was not known till Mr. Waller introduced it," .. and that Sir John Denham's poem upon Cooper's Hill

" is and ever will be, for majesty of style, the exact standard of good writing!"

When Dryden was a boy, he was more delighted with the bombastic passages in Sylvester's Du Bartas, than with Spenser. When he commenced his career as a poet, which was not at an early age, he took Davenant for his model, and composed his *Annus Mirabilis* in quatrains, " judging them," he said, " more noble and of greater dignity, both for the sound and number, than any other verse in use amongst us." At that time he envied the advantages which the ancients enjoyed in not being tied to the slavery of any rhyme, and regretted that the moderns were " constrained in the close of that one syllable, which often confines and more often corrupts the sense of all the rest. But in this necessity of our rhymes," said he, " I have always found the couplet verse most easy, —for there the work is soonest at an end, every two lines concluding the labour of the poet; but in quatrains he is to carry it farther on; and not only so, but to bear along in his head the troublesome sense of four lines together. For those who write correctly in this kind must needs acknowledge that the last line of the stanza is to be considered in the composition of the first."

Perhaps this passage may disclose the reason why Dryden employed the couplet in his translations, and when he contracted with Jacob Tonson to furnish verses by the thousand. He could have chosen no other measure for his modernized versions of Chaucer; but the same course of reflection which, after he had

written his defence of rhymed tragedies, led him in his latter years to acknowledge his error, might have induced him to cast his English Virgil in a different mould, if facility and expedition had not been with him the chief consideration. In that measure, however, he wrote not with ease only, but with a freedom and vigour which entitle him to all the praise that he has received as a great master in his art. The superiority of the couplet to all other measures was completely established in public opinion by his example and authority; and the versifyers of the succeeding age (for poets there were none), looked to Dryden as their model with as much deference as their predecessors in the generations between Chaucer and Surrey, had looked to the great father of English poetry.

But when Johnson asserts that before the time of Dryden "the happy combinations of words which distinguish poetry from prose had been rarely attempted," and that "there was no poetical diction, no system of words at once refined from the grossness[14] of domestic use, and free from the harshness of terms appropriated to particular arts,"—Dryden himself never advanced a more inconsiderate assertion. "From his time," says Johnson, "English poetry has had no tendency to relapse to its former savageness." That it should fall back to the rudeness of an unsettled and rude speech,

[14] The same kind of reformation has been thus described in France, I know not by what author: *Un melange de termes familiers et nobles défigurait tous les ouvrages sérieux. C'est Boileau qui le premier enseigna l'art de parler toujours convenablement.* But Dryden agreed neither in opinion nor in practice with Voltaire's maxim, that *plus la poësie est devenue difficile, plus elle est belle;* a maxim quite worthy of a French critic.

was impossible; time had polished the language, and the Bible and the liturgy had fixed it; the tendency to degenerate was in another way. Justly as Johnson condemned the metaphysical poets, he saw how superior they were to those who were trained up in the school of Dryden. "To write on their plan," he has truly said, "it was at least necessary to read and think. No man could be born a metaphysical poet, nor assume the dignity of a writer by descriptions copied from descriptions, by imitations borrowed from imitations, by traditional imagery, and hereditary similes, by readiness of rhyme and volubility of syllables."

Johnson has also said, that the veneration with which Dryden's name is pronounced by every cultivator of English literature, is paid to him for having improved the sentiments of English poetry. When he bestowed this unmerited praise, he must have forgotten Milton; and Milton, indeed, as a poet, belonged so little to his age, that he may easily have been overlooked in Johnson's estimate; but he overlooked, at the same time, every other poet who had treated any serious subject with any sense of the dignity of his calling. One effect of the Restoration had been to lower the standard of poetry, and in this respect Dryden did nothing toward raising it. Too little ambitious of true fame, and too needy ever to have leisure for attempting to execute any great and worthy design which he may have conceived, he contented himself with subjects of temporary interest, and was beholden, perhaps, for his popularity, as much to the subjects as to the ability with which they were treated. What he

called the legislative[15] style of his poetry, being addressed to the judicious, could, if it found fit audience, find but few; but when he seasoned it with political satire, then, indeed, numbers who were incapable of appreciating in any degree its literary excellence, were delighted to see their own opinions triumphantly asserted. The *Religio Laici* might deter common readers by its very title, as if it were intended only for the learned; the Hind and Panther fell upon what to him were "evil days." But Mac Flecknoe was the talk of coffee-houses and of all literary circles; and Absalom and Achitophel had a greater sale in the country[16] than any work which was at that time remembered.

"The fury of a civil war, and power, for twenty years together, abandoned to a barbarous race of men, enemies of all good learning, had buried the muses," Dryden said, "under the ruins of monarchy; yet," he adds, "with the restoration of our happiness, we see revived poesy lifting up its head, and already

[15] "The expressions of a poem designed purely for instruction ought to be plain and natural, and yet majestic; for here the poet is presumed to be a kind of lawgiver, and those three qualities which I have named are proper to the legislative style. The florid, elevated, and figurative way is for the passions; for love and hatred, fear and anger, are begotten in the soul by showing their objects out of their true proportion, either greater than the life or less; but instruction is to be given by showing them what they naturally are. A man is to be cheated into passion, but to be reasoned into truth."—*Preface to Religio Laici.*

[16] Johnson's father, who was "an old bookseller in the country, told him he had not known it equalled by any thing except Sacheverel's trial."

shaking off the rubbish which lay so heavy on it." Alas! the only poetry which lifted up its head, was that which was heard in meetings where

> Flowing cups went freely round,
> With no allaying Thames [17];

and it had been well if there it had been only such as might allowably and blamelessly be addressed to

> Careless heads with roses crown'd,
> And hearts with loyal flames [17];

but the corruption of manners which ensued upon the Reformation, when profligacy succeeded to puritanism in natural course, was felt immediately in this branch of literature. It led, as it ever must lead, to a corruption of taste. Inflated tragedies, comedies so grossly indecent that, if it were possible for them now to be brought upon the stage, they would be driven off with hootings of execration, lewd tales in verse, songs, epigrams, and satires, in which ribaldry or malignity served for condiment; occasional verses, the best of which deserved to be remembered no longer than while the occasion which called them forth was recent; —for such poetry, fit and large audience might be found, but for any thing better, the public, or as it was then called, the Town, had neither inclination nor capacity. The age from Dryden to Pope is the worst age of English poetry.

Dryden himself lowered its tone, even while he improved the style of versification. He never aimed at any high mark. His good sense prevented him from over-valuing himself, and aspiring to become eminent

[17] Lovelace.

either as a sublime or a pathetic poet. When he wrote for popular applause, he thought of the public with the Romish priests, *populus vult decipi et decipietur;* he knew that, on the stage, bombast might pass for poetry, as tinsel served for gold; and confessing that there were passages in his tragedies which called vengeance upon him for their extravagance, and which he repented of among his sins, he said, "All I can say for those passages is, that I knew they were bad enough to please, even when I wrote them[18]." In satire, on the contrary, he felt his strength; and in that legislative or didactic strain wherein he excelled all predecessors in his own language, he has not been excelled by any who have followed him. In this he addressed himself exclusively to the understanding; there was nothing for the imagination, nothing for the feelings. But there was no mannerism in his style that could be aped, no mechanism that could be discovered and imitated, no artifices that could be copied, and not many of those expressions and turns of phrase which they who mistake memory for invention might add to their stock of common places. His ease, and vigour, and perspicuity were not attainable by imitative talents. Prior was the only one of his immediate successors who equalled him in ease; but when Prior in his greatest work attempted to improve upon Dryden's versification, the attempt would have been more successful if it had been less evidently elaborate.

Pope carefully studied both these poets, and perhaps did not disdain to study and profit by the only respectable poem of Sir Richard Blackmore. Black-

[18] Epistle Dedicatory to the Spanish Fryar.

more's Creation is in its diction and its numbers so unlike his miserable epics, that it seems like the work of another mind. The four epics are among the most worthless that ever were composed, though Molyneux, in his admiration of them, thought that "all our poets, except Milton, were mere ballad-makers in comparison with him," and Locke agreed in this opinion with his friend; though Tom Browne said, that "if he had stopped his hand at Prince Arthur, he had gone off with some applause;" and though Watts called them excellent, and praised the author for the happy example which he had given in all the shining colours of profuse and florid diction. Notwithstanding these eulogies, they deserved to sink in oblivion, and must irretrievably have sunk, if they had not more unfortunately been consigned to remembrance by Dryden and Pope. But Addison has said of his philosophical poem, that it is to be looked upon as one of the most useful and noble productions in our English verse; and Johnson, who has properly included it in his Collection of the Poets, says of it, "it wants neither harmony of numbers, accuracy of thought, nor elegance of diction.—To reason in verse is allowed to be difficult, but Blackmore not only reasons in verse, but very often reasons poetically, and finds the art of uniting ornament with strength, and ease with closeness. This," says Johnson, "was that which Pope might have condescended to learn from him, when he needed it so much in his Moral Essays." If Pope condescended to learn any thing from Blackmore, which I am inclined to think he did, he should in gratitude, as well as in justice, have bestowed on him a redeeming verse

in the Dunciad; he was as well entitled to it as Aaron Hill.

The age of Pope was the golden age of poets[19],—but it was the pinchbeck age of poetry. They flourished in the sunshine of public and private patronage; the art meantime was debased, and it continued to be so as long as Pope continued lord of the ascendant. More injury was not done to the taste of his countrymen by Marino in Italy, nor by Gongora in Spain, than by Pope in England. The mischief was effected not by his satirical and moral pieces, for these entitle him to the highest place among poets of his class; it was by his Homer. There have been other versions as unfaithful; but none were ever so well executed in as bad a style; and no other work in the language so greatly vitiated the diction of English

[19] Zachary Grey, the editor of Hudibras, thought that in his time (1744) poetry had arrived at the summit of perfection, and that the reason thereof was the munificent regard which in this nation had been shown towards it. "If," said he, "we lament the neglected poets of former ages, we can in this congratulate double the number who now flourish, or have flourished in the midst of fame and veneration. For poor Homer, we can boast of his admirable translator; for Spenser, we can name his last editor, the late Mr. Hughes, (who enjoyed a beneficial place under the Lords Chancellors Cowper and Macclesfield;) and his son Philips, (see the Guardian, No. 32,)—(Ambrose, to wit!) The late Mr. Addison, Sir Richard Steele, and Mr. Congreve may compensate for a Dryden and an Otway; and for Mr. Butler we can refer to the late Mr. Prior and Dean Swift."

Zachary Grey was a good editor,—but he had odd notions of compensation, and of poetry.

poetry. Common readers (and the majority must always be such) will always be taken by glittering faults, as larks are caught by bits of looking-glass: and in this meretricious translation, the passages that were most unlike the original, which were most untrue to nature, and therefore most false in taste, were precisely those which were most applauded, and on which critic after critic dwelt with one cuckoo note of admiration. They who found nothing imitable in Dryden, could imitate this. The art of poetry, or rather the art of versification, which was now the same thing, was "made easy to the meanest capacity."

It was said of Blackmore's verses that if they "rhymed and rattled, all was well." In the fashion which was now established as a standard, the lines rhymed more exactly, and rattled more; and to question that standard was accounted a heresy in criticism. The point of perfection had been reached. Bishop Hurd said, "that Pope had shut the door against poetry, as Addison had by his Drummer against comedy[20]." Without disparaging the Drummer it may be truly said that we have later comedies which are quite as good; and if Pope shut the door, Cowper opened it.

Before Cowper's time there were several who found admittance through the wicket. And it is a noticeable fact, that of all the poets in the intermediate half century, not one who attained to any distinction which he has since held, or is likely to hold, was of the school

[20] Cradock's Recollections, vol. iv. p. 199.

of Pope[21]. That school has produced versifiers in abundance, but no poet. No man of genius, nor even of original talents acknowledged his supremacy, while his authority was paramount with the public, and its blind guides. But it is not less remarkable, that among the poets of that interval, whose works have lived and deserved to live, there were none who produced such an effect upon their contemporaries or successors, that their influence can be perceived in the literature of the age, none from whom young minds received an impulse strong enough to bias in the slightest degree their future course. Except Pope himself, there is no one whose name is so generally known in other countries as the author of the Night Thoughts, and Pope is known only by name where that work has been rendered popular by translation. Yet though the strain of this poem is stamped with the strongest mannerism, and both the matter and the manner are of a kind to affect the reader powerfully and deeply, Blair's Grave is the only poem I can call to mind which has been composed in imitation of it. Milton has had many imitators, the best of whom have borne no happier resemblance to him than a monumental effigy bears to the life; but a style so full of point and epigram, as Young's, deterred copyists; whereas an imitator of Milton, if he succeeded in producing a dead likeness, might satisfy himself, .. for one who was capable of perceiving that the life was

[21] One of the greatest poets of this century, says Beattie, the late and much-lamented Mr. Gray of Cambridge, modestly declared to me, that if there was in his own numbers any thing that deserved approbation, he had learned it all from Dryden.

wanting, would never have ventured upon the audacious attempt. They who would imitate Tacitus, or Sir Thomas Brown, must be able to think like them; and Young's poetry presents a difficulty of the same kind[22].

Thomson is another poet of the same age who had no productive influence in this sense, though in another and better way, he had a wider one than Young; for Thomson brought with him, from his own beautiful country, a deep perception and true love of the beauties of nature, for which the English poets, from Dryden to Pope, seem to have had neither eye, nor ear, nor heart. Cowper thought Thomson admirable in description[23], and no man's judgement could carry with it more authority on this point, for his own descriptions were all from nature; not one of them second-handed; he has told us this[24], and they carry their evidence with them. "But it always seemed to him," he said, "that there was something of affectation in Thomson's style, and that his numbers are sometimes not well harmonized[23]." He considered him, however, as a true poet, and that his lasting fame had proved it. The opinion rested upon better ground than the proof, for Thomson's fame was not then of more than a single life's duration; and older reputations, which for a while had spread wider and flourished more, have since that time passed away.

Little can be ascertained concerning Cowper's youth-

[22] Dr. Johnson had forgotten the Night Thoughts, when he said in his life of Milton, that "the good and evil of eternity are too ponderous for the wings of wit."

[23] To Mrs. King, June 19, 1788.

[24] To Mrs. Unwin, Oct. 10, 1784.

ful reading and first predilections in poetry. The earliest of his poems which has been preserved, is an imitation of the Splendid Shilling, written in his seventeenth year; and certainly none but a boy of great power, as well as great promise, could have produced it, nor without considerable practice in verse. Hudibras and Prior's Alma were both favourites with him in early life, and at that time he often read them[25]. But he thought that Solomon was Prior's best poem[26], whether we consider the subject or the execution; and that he is an author[27] who with much labour indeed, but with admirable success, has embellished all his poems with the most charming ease. "Every man conversant with verse-writing," he says, "knows, and knows by painful experience, that the familiar style is of all styles the most difficult to succeed in. To make verse speak the language of prose without being prosaic, to marshal the words of it in such an order as they might naturally take in falling from the lips of an extemporary speaker, yet without meanness, harmoniously, elegantly, and without seeming to displace a syllable for the sake of the rhyme, is one of the most arduous tasks a poet can undertake. He that could accomplish this task was Prior: many have imi-

[25] To Mr. Unwin, March 21, 1784. He asks, and with good reason, what could have suggested to Johnson the thought that Alma was written in imitation of Hudibras? often as he had read them in former years, he says, he never saw in them the least resemblance to each other, except that they are composed in verse of the same measure; nor could he now.

[26] To Mr. Unwin, Jan. 5, 1782.

[27] To Mr. Unwin, Jan. 17, 1782.

tated his excellence in this particular, but the best copies have fallen far short of the original."

This admiration of a poet with whom he had little that was congenial in his own mind, he probably learnt from Lloyd, for his taste had been very much influenced by the set with which he associated in early life. He thought too meanly of Gray and Mason when his friends ridiculed them; but like those friends, he lived to perceive that he had been misled by youthful presumption[28], and to make honourable amends. With Churchill he admired Dryden; but he had none of that dislike for Pope, which in Churchill seems to have produced a feeling of personal animosity. "I could never," says Cowper, "agree with those who preferred him to Dryden; nor with others, (I have known such, and persons of taste and discernment too,) who could not allow him to be a poet at all. He was certainly a mechanical maker of verses; and in every line he ever wrote we see indubitable marks of most indefatigable industry and labour. Writers who find it necessary to make such strenuous and painful exertions, are generally as phlegmatic as they are correct; but Pope was, in this respect, exempted from the common lot of authors of that class. With the unwearied application of a plodding Flemish painter, who draws a shrimp with the most minute exactness, he had all the genius of one of the first masters. Never, I believe, were such talents and such drudgery united. But I admire Dryden most, who has succeeded by mere dint of genius, and in spite of a laziness and carelessness almost peculiar to himself.

[28] See Vol. i. p. 262.

His faults are numberless, and so are his beauties. His faults are those of a great man; and his beauties are such (at least sometimes) as Pope, with all his touching and retouching, could never equal[29]."

While his first volume was in the press, he told Mr. Unwin[30] that he had not read an English poet for thirteen years, and but one for twenty years; who that one may have been, there is nothing either in his correspondence or his poems that can lead us to surmise. He reckoned this among his principal advantages, as a composer of verses. "Imitation," said he, "even of the best models is my aversion; it is servile and mechanical; a trick that has enabled many to usurp the name of author, who could not have written at all, if they had not written upon the pattern of somebody indeed original. But when the ear and the taste have been much accustomed to the manner of others, it is almost impossible to avoid it; and we imitate in spite of ourselves, just in proportion as we admire." Two years afterwards it appears that he persisted in the same opinion; "Poetry," said he, "English poetry, I never touch, being pretty much addicted to the writing of it, and knowing that much intercourse with those gentlemen betrays us unavoidably into a habit of imitation, which I hate and despise most cordially[31]."

When Cowper said that he had read no English poetry for so many years, the words must not be too literally taken; he can only have meant that he had perused none with that degree of attention, or that fre-

[29] To Mr. Unwin, Jan. 5, 1782.
[30] Nov. 24, 1781.
[31] To Mr. Hill, Nov. 23, 1783.

quency, which might have affected his own compositions. When Johnson's edition of the British Poets appeared, Mr. Unwin lent them to him. His remark, when he had merely looked into some of the volumes, was, "A few things I have met with, which if they had been burnt the moment they were written, it would have been better for the author, and at least as well for his readers. There is not much of this, but a little is too much. I think it a pity the editor admitted any, the English muse would have lost no credit by the omission of such trash[32]."

England, I believe, is the only country in which any general collection of its poets has been attempted. The first was brought forward by a noted bookseller, named John Bell, to whom the artists of that time were beholden for some opportunities of making themselves known, and of whom, more than of any other publisher, it may be said that he introduced a taste for fine printing. He, in the year 1777, announced an edition of the Poets of Great Britain, complete, from Chaucer to Churchill. The more respectable of the London booksellers[33], regarding this as an invasion of

[32] To Mr. Unwin, May 26, 1779.

[33] Mr. Dilly, the bookseller, who states these circumstances at the time in a letter to Boswell, calls Bell's a little trifling edition; and says that the type was so extremely small that many persons could not read it, and not only this inconvenience attended it, but the inaccuracy of the press was very conspicuous."—*Croker's Boswell*, vol. iii. p. 474.

I know not whether Johnson's edition was more accurate; but this I know, that unless the press be carefully compared with the last edition of a book that has passed under the author's own eye, every new edition will introduce new cor-

what they called their literary property, (as by the custom of the trade it was considered to be,) resolved upon publishing a rival edition, which should have the advantages of an ostensible and competent editor, of a more correct text, and of including several authors, whose works being still copyright by law, could not be printed unless with the consent of those publishers in whom that right was vested. Dr. Johnson, as holding deservedly the highest rank among his contemporaries, was the person whom they solicited to undertake the task, and to write the lives of the poets. And they also, like Bell, proposed to commence with Chaucer, and include all the English poets down to their own time.

The selection, however, was made not by the editor, but by the booksellers; and they were directed in it by no other criterion than that of public opinion, as evinced in the demand for certain books; the poet whose works were not called for was dead to them. Departing, therefore, on that consideration, from their first intention, instead of commencing their collection with Chaucer, they began with Cowley. Bell's comprised only three earlier writers, Chaucer, Spenser, and Donne: and it is not to the honour of our country that his collection, which was a mere bookseller's affair, and on which no care or attention was bestowed, should still contain the only convenient and most complete edition of the works of the great father of English poetry.

When Cowper first looked into Johnson's collection,

ruptions into the text, and of the very worst kind, by the careless substitution of words which, without making nonsense of the passage, alter its meaning, or destroy its beauty.

some of the writers therein included, seemed in his opinion to have but a very disputable right among the classics. "I am quite at a loss," said he, "when I see them in such company to conjecture what is Dr. Johnson's idea or definition of classical merit. But if he inserts the poems of some who can hardly be said to deserve such an honour, the purchaser may comfort himself with the hope that he will exclude none that do[34]." Johnson himself was only responsible for the insertion of Blackmore's Creation, Pomfret, Yalden, and Watts. Cowper also would have given Watts a place there, deeming him, "if I am," he says, "a judge of verse, a man of true poetical ability; careless indeed for the most part, and inattentive to those niceties which constitute elegance of expression, but frequently sublime in his conceptions, and masterly in his execution[35]:"—higher praise than that busy-minded and benevolent good man is entitled to as a poet. The Creation, too, he would have admitted, for he thought that Blackmore shone in that work, "though he had written," he said, "more absurdities in verse than any writer of our country[36]." This is not the judgement which he would have pronounced if he had read all or any of Sir Richard's epics; for they are uniformly grave and dull, and it is rarely that a ray of absurdity enlivens them. For Pomfret, .. the wonder is not that Johnson introduced, but that the bookseller should have overlooked one who would at that time certainly have been elected by universal suffrage to a seat in the assembly of poets.

[34] To Mr. Unwin, May 26, 1779.

[35] To Mr. Newton, Sept. 18, 1781.

[36] Ibid.

Yalden was indebted for it to the editor's special grace.

The perusal of Johnson's Lives left an uncomfortable impression upon Cowper. "It is a melancholy observation," he says, "which it is impossible not to make, after having run through this series, that where there were such shining talents, there should be so little virtue. These luminaries of our country seem to have been kindled into a brighter blaze than others, only that their spots might be more noticed:—so much can nature do for our intellectual part, and so little for our moral!—I know not but one might search these volumes with a candle, as the prophet says, to find a man, and not find one, unless, perhaps, Arbuthnot were he[37]."—"In all the number I observe but one man (a poet of no great fame,—of whom I did not know that he existed till I found him there,) whose mind seems to have had the slightest tincture of religion; and he was hardly in his senses. His name was Collins. He sunk into a state of melancholy, and died young. Not long before his death, he was found at his lodgings in Islington by his biographer, with the New Testament in his hand. He said to Johnson, 'I have but one book; but it is the best.' Of him, therefore, there are some hopes. But from the lives of all the rest there is but one inference to be drawn:—that poets are a very worthless wicked set of people[38]."

The opinion thus severely expressed, was as inconsiderately formed as it is uncharitable. In proof of it,

[37] To Mr. Unwin, March 21, 1784.

[38] To Mr. Newton, March 19, 1784.

he alleged that Dryden was a sycophant to the public taste, sinning against his feelings, lewd in his writings though chaste in his conversation; that Pope was vain and petulant, painfully sensible of censure, and yet restless in provocation; that Addison stooped to mean artifices in hopes of injuring the reputation of his friend; and that Savage was a profligate scoundrel. Now it is true that nothing is known of Savage but what is bad; and yet he who was remembered with so much affection by so good a man as Johnson, could not have been without some redeeming qualities. And if Cowper had not been under the immediate influence of dark and morbid views, he would have called to mind that there is nothing injurious to morality in any of Dryden's living works (his comedies have happily been long defunct); that Pope was intentionally, as well as professedly, a moral poet; and that Addison might be truly said to have left "no line, which dying, he could wish to blot!" They had their failings as all men have, but those failings are more conspicuous in their biography than they were in their lives; the general tenour of which, if not blameless, (for of whom can that be said?) deserved and obtained, in a high degree, the esteem and respect of those to whom they were best known. But what he thus said, was an effusion of splenetic feeling in some gloomy hour, not the result of reflection, nor in accord with his disposition. He did not call to mind how many of those writers, whose lives Johnson has recorded, were men of irreproachable conversation, who departed in the faith and fear of the Lord; and he himself has said, not less piously than charitably, "that the mercy which can

forgive iniquity, will never be severe to mark our frailties[39]."

That he should never before have heard of Collins, shows how little Collins had been heard of in his lifetime; and that Cowper, in his knowledge of contemporary literature, was now awakening, as it were, from a sleep of twenty years. In the course of those years Collins's Odes, which were utterly neglected on their first appearance, had obtained their due estimation. It will never be forgotten in the history of English poetry, that with a generous, and a just, though impatient sense of indignation, Collins, as soon as his means enabled him, repaid the publisher the price which he had received for their copyright, indemnified him for his loss in the adventure, and committed the remainder, which was by far the greater part of the impression, to the flames. But it should also be remembered, that in the course of one generation these poems, without any adventitious aid to bring them into notice, were acknowledged to be the best of their kind in the language. Silently and imperceptibly they had risen by their own buoyancy, and their power was felt by every reader who had any true poetic feeling[40].

But if Collins was a name unknown till then to Cowper, Churchill was still with him "the great

[39] To Lady Hesketh, Oct. 10, 1765.

[40] Johnson, though he seems to have loved and respected Collins, never betrayed his want of that feeling more than when he summed up the criticism on his writings, by saying, that "as men are often esteemed who cannot be loved, so the poetry of Collins may sometimes extort praise when it gives little pleasure"

Churchill," though that reputation, which had risen like a meteor, seemed to have passed away like one. Collins had been neglected during his life; a more cruel neglect was Churchill's portion after his death. Only a day before that event took place, he made his will, wherein it is mournful to observe there is not the slightest expression of religious faith or hope. He said in it, "I desire my dear friend, John Wilkes, Esq., to collect and publish my works, with the remarks and explanations he has prepared, and any others he thinks proper to make." There can be no doubt that Wilkes, who was with him during his illness, engaged to undertake this office, nor that he intended to perform it; for though he could feign friendship when he sought to make any one his dupe, his affections where he felt it were sincere and warm. "As to the province our dear Churchill has allotted me," he says in one of his letters, "I will do it to the best of my poor abilities. My life shall be dedicated to it[41]." In another, written a fortnight after his friend's death, he writes, "I am better, but cannot get any continued sleep. The idea of Churchill is ever before my eyes. A pleasing melancholy will, perhaps, succeed in time, and then I shall be fit for something. As I am, there is not a more useless animal in the world. My mind turns much on my dear friend's request about his works. I desire to live, first, to show my gratitude to my friends, then my detestation of our enemies[42]!"—"I begin to recover from the late cruel blow, but I believe I shall never get quite over it[43]."—"You know in what a rest-

[41] To Mr. Cotes, Nov. 11, 1764.
[42] Nov. 19, 1764.
[43] Nov. 26.

less state a man's spirits must be, who does not sleep. Churchill is still before my eyes[44]."

The promised edition was to be worthy of his deceased friend, and of himself. "He would never," he said, "risk any crudities with the public. No man who has any reputation was ever written out of it, but by himself[45]." Some months afterward, telling his daughter how closely he was employed upon his friend's works, he said, "you see how much I have at heart to show the world how I loved Churchill, and what influence those I loved, even when gone from us, retain over me." "The loss of Churchill," he said, "he should always think the most cruel of all the afflictions he had suffered, and he would soon convince mankind that he knew how to value such superior genius and merit[46]." His first intention was to print the work at Lausanne, and Voltaire, whom he visited at this time, offered him the assistance of his printers. Giving up this plan, he proposed printing it at Naples, where he had settled himself, as he supposed, for a time, during his outlawry; when he found that there were obstacles to his design there, he thought again of Lausanne, or of Geneva, or Amsterdam, there to publish a first edition of his dear friend's valuable remains, leaving it to a second to rectify the mistakes which his long absence from England might occasion. He said that he had already more than half finished it. "I am ever intent," said he, to Humphrey Cotes, "on doing honour to the memory of a departed friend, whom I most dearly loved; and all the services to my native country, which

[44] Dec. 10.

[45] April 23, 1765.

[46] To Mr. Cotes, May 21.

are in the reach of my poor abilities. You, Lord Temple, and a few more, will find the just tribute of praise which the public and I owe you. Bute, Holland, and Sandwich will see that I think of them just as I did in England."

He talked largely of his annotations[47]. "No man," said he, "has ever taken more pains that notes (a dull business of itself) may not disgrace his fair classic page. How pleased is the dear shade of our friend with all I have done! I am sure of it." But the promised oblation to his friend's shade was never performed. The few notes which Wilkes had actually prepared, were not published till after his own death, some forty years afterwards; and were then found to contain little or nothing more than a repetition of well known facts, of malice which had previously done its worst, and of profligacy which had long been sufficiently notorious. Churchill's poems were indeed brought together in a col-

[47] Much was expected from them, even by foreigners. In the *Mémoires Secrets* for that year, is the following article. 22 Nov. *La Littérature Angloise vient de faire une perte considérable par la mort de M. Charles Churchill, que ses Satyres ont rendu célèbre. Il avoit passé de Londres à Boulogne pour voir son ami M. Wilkes, devenu par ses Satyres en prose encore plus célèbre que lui. Il y est mort d'une fièvre milliaire. Il a chargé par son testament M. Wilkes de recueiller et de publier ses ouvrages, avec des remarques et des explications. Personne n'est plus propre à bien exécuter cette commission. M. Wilkes et M. Churchill pensoient et sentoient de même.* Vol. ii. p. 133.

The French writer adds, "*Il est dommage que les Satyres de M. Churchill soient trop personelles, et que le fond tienne à des querelles de parti et à des circonstances momentanées, dont l'intérêt varie et se perd bientôt.*" They who were not under the influence of party feeling could perceive this.

lected form, but not by Wilkes, nor in a new edition; the remaining copies of his several pieces were merely arranged in two volumes, and published by subscription. A single poem, the only complete one found among his papers, was all that was added. Professing in this to take for his subject,

> A plain, unlaboured journey of a day,

he exhorted the Muses to amuse themselves with his contemporary poets during his absence, and concluded some of his most vigorous, but most misdirected satire with these lines:

> Thus, or in any better way they please,
> With these great men, or with great men like these,
> Let them their appetite for laughter feed;
> I on my journey all alone proceed.

Little did he apprehend when that last verse was written, whither and how soon he was about to depart!

Nor is this the only passage wherein the poet may seem to have unconsciously written a prophetic strain with regard to himself.

> Some of my friends, (for friends I must suppose
> All who, not daring to appear my foes,
> Feign great good will, and, not more full of spite
> Than full of craft, under false colours fight;)
> Some of my friends,—(so lavishly I print)
> As more in sorrow than in anger, hint,
> (Though that indeed will scarce admit a doubt,)
> That I shall run my stock of genius out,
> My no great stock, and publishing so fast,
> Must needs become a bankrupt at the last.
>
> * * * *
>
> "The mind of man craves rest, and cannot bear,
> Though next in power to God's, continual care.

Genius himself (nor here let genius frown)
Must to ensure his vigour, be laid down,
And fallowed well. Had Churchill known but this,
Which the most slight observer scarce could miss,
He might have flourished twenty years, or more,
Though now alas, poor man! worn out in four."

* * * *

Perturbed spirits rest, nor thus appear
To waste your counsels on a spendthrift's ear.
On your grave lessons I cannot subsist,
Nor even in verse become economist.
Rest then, my friends; nor, hateful to my eyes,
Let Envy in the shape of Pity, rise
To blast me ere my time; with patience wait,
('Tis no long interval,) propitious Fate
Shall glut your pride, and every son of phlegm
Find ample room to censure and condemn.
Read some three hundred lines, (no easy task,
But probably the last that I shall ask,)
And give me up for ever. Wait an hour,
Nay, not so much,—revenge is in your power,
And ye may cry, ere Time hath turn'd his glass,
Lo! what we prophesied is come to pass!

The unexpected death of a man in the flower of his age, who during four years had been one of the most conspicuous persons in England, and certainly the most popular poet, occasioned a strong feeling among that part of the public to whose political prepossessions and passions he had addressed himself. Some of his admirers were inconsiderate enough to talk of erecting a monument to him in Westminster Abbey; but if permission had been asked it must necessarily have been refused; it would indeed have been not less indecent to grant, than to solicit such an honour for a clergyman who had thrown off his gown, and renounced,

as there appeared too much reason to apprehend, his hope in Christ. His associates undoubtedly wished to have it believed that he had shown as little regard to religion in the last hours[48], as in the latter years of his life; and though they obtained Christian burial for him, by bringing the body from Boulogne to Dover, where it was interred in the old cemetery which once belonged to the collegiate church of St. Martin, they inscribed upon his tombstone, instead of any consolatory or monitory text, this epicurean line from one of his own poems,

Life to the last enjoyed, here Churchill lies.

Wilkes erected a monument to his friend's memory, in the grounds of his cottage at Sandham, in the Isle of Wight. It was a broken pillar, fluted, and of the Doric order, nine feet high, and five in diameter, placed in a grove, with weeping willows, cypresses, and yews

[48] "Mr. Davies, in his Life of Garrick, upon what he thinks good authority, hath related, that Churchill's last words were, *what a fool have I been!* Though he might, on several accounts, have had too much cause to make such a reflection, it is not true that it was made by him. 'This,' says Dr. Kippis, 'we have been assured of by Mr. Wilkes, whose testimony upon the subject must be decisive; and the same gentleman hath informed the world, that the goodness of Churchill's heart, and the firmness of his philosophy, were in full lustre during the whole time of his very severe illness; and that the amazing faculties of his mind were not in the least impaired till a few moments before his death.'"—*Biog. Britannica.*

Wilkes's testimony would be worth nothing on this point, if it were not corroborated by the last will and testament of his unhappy friend.

behind, laurels beside it, and bays, myrtles, laburnums, and other shrubs in the foreground. A tablet, on the pillar, bore this inscription:

CAROLO CHURCHILL,
AMICO JUCUNDO,
POETÆ ACRI,
CIVI OPTIME DE PATRIA MERITO
P.
JOHANNES WILKES.
M DCC LXV.

The same words he inscribed upon a sepulchral alabaster urn, sent him from Rome by the Abbe Winckelman, who was then the superintendent of the antiquities in that city.

The only laudable part of Churchill's conduct during his short career of popularity was that he carefully laid by a provision for those who were dependent on him. This was his meritorious motive for that greediness of gain with which he was reproached[49], .. as if it were any reproach to a successful author that he doled out his writings in the way most advantageous for himself, and fixed upon them as high a price as his admirers were willing to pay. He thus enabled himself to bequeath an annuity of sixty pounds to his widow, and of fifty to the more unhappy woman, who, after they had both re-

[49] "Go on, illustrious bard! (said a Monthly Reviewer, vol. xxxi. p. 275.) Thou art in the right road to independence. Indulge the reigning depravity of taste; get deeper still in dirt; the half crowns will wash thee clean. Leave elegance and harmony to others; in these *stirring* times they will not procure thee sixpence. To use thy own phraseology, "they will not go to market."

pented of their guilty intercourse, had fled to him again for the protection which she knew not where else to seek. And when these duties had been provided for, there remained some surplus for his two sons. Well would it be if he might be as fairly vindicated on other points. He left for publication ten sermons, which he had sold to his publishers for two hundred and fifty pounds, that price being afforded in consideration of a dedicatory poem to Bishop Warburton, in a strain of the severest sarcasm. The dedication was found unfinished among his papers, but there was enough of it to secure the sale of an otherwise unsaleable book[50], and to evince once more the vigour and the acrimony of the writer. Such an introduction to a volume of

[50] The Monthly Reviewer, however, seems to have thought that Churchill's name would have been attraction sufficient. He says, "though there is scarce any species of composition which meets with a cooler reception from the generality of readers than sermons, Churchill's Sermons will undoubtedly excite great curiosity. Those who admire the bold and daring genius of the poet, will expect something extraordinary in the preacher, and will open the volume with great impatience."

The whole satire is extracted in this reviewal;—which concludes with a remark not the less striking for being obvious:—"We cannot help observing that Churchill the poet and Churchill the preacher appear to be very different characters. In his poems he is an outrageous and merciless satirist; in his sermons a meek and peaceable Christian. Yet strange as the mixture may seem, in the present publication he is *both* characters in *one!* It is really an extraordinary appearance to see a commentary on that form of prayer composed by Benevolence itself, preceded by a virulent libel!—But let us not forget, that when this enraged wasp, for the last time, darted his sting at Warburton, it BROKE, and the poor angry soul expired!"—Vol. xxxii. pp. 101. 109.

sermons would have excited the indignation of any well-regulated mind if it had appeared during the author's life; as a posthumous work, it occasioned a more painful feeling; and Warburton may have contemplated with sorrow what he would otherwise have regarded with scorn.

Churchill hated Warburton, for no apparent cause, except that he thought himself bound in friendship to take up all Wilkes's quarrels, and the Bishop had complained in the House of Lords of a gross and flagitious insult which that profligate had offered him. Yet there were more points of resemblance between Warburton and Churchill than any other two men of their age; they resembled each other in strength of character, in vigour and activity of mind, in their contemptuous sense of superiority over all who opposed them, and in a certain coarseness of nature, which was marked in the countenance of both, .. which Churchill did not fail to note[51] in the object of his enmity, .. and of which he was not unconscious in himself[52].

[51] 'Tis not thy face,—though that by Nature's made
An index to thy soul; though there display'd
We see thy mind at large, and through thy skin
Peeps out that courtesy which dwells within.

[52] The portrait of himself is a full length:—

A bear, whom from the moment he was born
His dam despised, and left unlick'd in scorn;
A Babel, which the power of Art undone,
She could not finish when she had begun;
An utter Chaos, out of which no might,
But that of God, could strike one spark of light.

Broad were his shoulders, and from blade to blade
A H—— might at full length have laid:

In his bitter dedication Churchill says,

> Much did I wish, though little could I hope,
> A friend in him who was the friend of Pope.

Perhaps that wish may have been really entertained; and if favourable circumstances had introduced them to each other before the revolution in Churchill's character was effected, he might have found as much pleasure and intellectual sympathy in Warburton's society as he afterwards did in Wilkes's; they would have admired and liked each other; and if the Bishop had failed to awaken in him a perception of the beauty of holiness and the truth of religion, he would at least have made him feel the rashness and the folly of infidelity.

> Vast were his bones, his muscles twisted strong;
> His face was short, but broader than 'twas long;
> His features, though by nature they were large,
> Contentment had contrived to overcharge
> And bury meaning; save that we might spy
> Sense louring on the penthouse of his eye.
> His arms were two twin oaks; his legs so stout
> That they might bear a mansion-house about;
> Nor were they, look but at his body there,
> Design'd by fate a much less weight to bear.
>
> O'er a brown cassock, which had once been black,
> Which hung in tatters on his brawny back,
> A sight most strange and awkward to behold,
> He threw a covering of blue and gold.
> Just at that time of life, when man, by rule,
> The fop laid down, takes up the graver fool,
> He started up a fop, and, fond of show,
> Look'd like another Hercules, turn'd beau!
>
> *Independence*, v. 149—174.

As he hated Warburton for Wilkes's sake, so, perhaps, it may have been partly for Warburton's sake that he hated Pope, .. for his dislike of Pope amounted to hatred. He is said to have wished him alive, not only that he might have a struggle with him for pre-eminence, but that he might endeavour to break his heart. Though such bravados of malignity are, for the most part, far from meaning all that they express, they can never be uttered or conceived without self injury. He disliked Pope's manner as a poet, and his character as a man[53], and had formed the intention of attacking both[54]. "Mr. Pope," said he, in a letter to Wilkes,

[53] The Monthly Review observes that this "enmity, which broke out so long after Pope's death, is somewhat extraordinary, and the more so, as the satirist's spleen seems chiefly to have been directed against his *private character*, a circumstance in regard to which, we believe, there are not many who hold the two poets in equal estimation. What ample room is there for recrimination on the traducer of Mr. Pope's heart! But it were unnecessary, as well as an ungrateful task, to enlarge on this topic—since few, if any, of our readers are strangers to the moral character and conduct of Charles Churchill."—Vol. xli. p. 378.

[54] Wilkes says, he "intended to have sifted every part of his character," and Wilkes gives his own opinion of Pope. "His writings," he says, "almost the only truly correct, elegant, and high-finished poems in our language, breathe the purest morality, the most perfect humanity and benevolence. In the commerce of life, however, he showed himself not scrupulously moral, and was a very selfish, splenetic, malevolent being. The friends whom he most loved, were the sworn enemies of the liberties of his country, Atterbury, Oxford, and Bolingbroke, on whom he lavished the sweet incense of a delicate exquisite praise, which ought only to have been purchased by virtue."

"ought surely to feel some instinctive terrors, for against him I have double-pointed all my little thunderbolts; in which, as to the design, I hope I shall have your approbation when you consider his heart; and as to the execution, if you approve it, I can sit down easily and hear with contempt the censures of all the half-blooded, prudish lords." It is not to be regretted that Churchill contented himself with libelling the living, and never carried into effect this injurious intention which he had entertained against the dead: for the force of even just criticism is weakened when it is delivered with an asperity that savours of personal malevolence. But if "it disgusted Churchill to hear Pope extolled as the first of English poets," his own judgement was not less erroneous when he assigned that place to Dryden. Dryden was, indeed, the best model whom, with his power and turn of mind, he could have chosen for himself, even if that power had always taken its best direction. He followed him with success. The freedom and vigour of his versification, in which sense was never sacrificed to sound, which was never tricked out with tinsel, nor spangled with false ornaments, which, whatever were its faults, was free from nonsense, and which always expressed in genuine English its clear meaning, contributed to prepare the way for a better taste than prevailed during Pope's undisputed supremacy. The injurious effects which had been caused by that dictatorship were weakened by Churchill's rule as Tribune of the people.

His immediate imitators were a despicable race; among his numerous opponents there had been a few whose greatest disadvantage was that they took the

better side, which, under a tribunate, is always the unsuccessful one; but those who attempted to tread in his steps, and succeed him, were mere libellers[55], with no other qualification than their impudence;.. "a Calmuck tribe of authors," they were called, "the brood of Churchill's spawn, and the heirs of his Billingsgate fortune." They passed away like a swarm of noxious insects; and Churchill himself was for a time depreciated[56] as unduly as he had been extolled. The first who rendered justice to his genius was Cowper:

> While servile trick and imitative knack
> Confine the million in the beaten track,
> Perhaps some courser, who disdains the road,
> Snuffs up the wind, and flings himself abroad.

---

[55] "The dominions of Alexander the Great had not more competitors after his decease than the poetical demesnes of the late Mr. Churchill. Various, indeed, are the candidates, but their pretences are nearly the same;—to measure couplets, to scatter abuse, and to praise the bard whose name they 'take in vain.' Their ambition, at the same time, is as sordid as their verse; for it is not Mr. Churchill's crown of laurel that they seek, but his half-crown sterling."—*Monthly Review*, February, 1765, vol. xxxii. p. 153.

Twenty years before a wretched precursor of these libelists complained of the restraint under which his "Indignant Muse" laboured—

> "Names must be conceal'd: O misfortune dire!
> Law checks my rage, and lawyers damp my fire.

[56] "A remarkable instance," says Dr. Kippis, "of a sudden and short-lived celebrity—and of a more than usual rapidity in the neglect paid to his writings."

"We all remember," says Dr. Warton, "when *even* a Churchill was more in vogue than a Gray."

Contemporaries all surpass'd, see one,
Short his career indeed, but ably run;
Churchill, himself unconscious of his powers,
In penury consumed his idle hours;
And like a scatter'd seed at random sown,
Was left to spring by vigour of his own.
Lifted at length by dignity of thought
And dint of genius to an affluent lot,
He laid his head on luxury's soft lap,
And took too often there his easy nap.
If brighter beams than all he threw not forth,
'Twas negligence in him, not want of worth.
Surly and slovenly, and bold and coarse,
Too proud for art, and trusting in mere force;
Spendthrift alike of money and of wit;
Always at speed, and never drawing bit,
He struck the lyre in such a careless mood,
And so disdain'd the rules he understood,
The laurel seem'd to wait on his command,
He snatch'd it rudely from the Muses' hand [57].

When Johnson's collection of the poets was lent to Cowper, he read but few of them: "those of established reputation," said he, "are so fresh in my memory, that it was like reading what I read yesterday over again: and as to the minor classics, I did not think them worth reading at all. I tasted most of them, and did not like them." But Churchill had been included in Bell's collection, where he brought up the rear; and in the same letter which expresses his disrespect for the mediocrists, Cowper says, "I have read him twice, and some of his pieces three times over, and the last time with more pleasure than the first.—He is indeed a careless writer for the most part, but where

[57] Table Talk.

shall we find in any of those authors who finish their works with the exactness of a Flemish pencil, those bold and daring strokes of fancy, those numbers so hazardously ventured upon and so happily finished, the matter so compressed and yet so clear, and the colouring so sparingly laid on and yet with such a beautiful effect? In short, it is not his least praise, that he is never guilty of those faults as a writer which he lays to the charge of others; a proof that he did not judge by a borrowed standard, or from rules laid down by critics; but that he was qualified to do it by his own native powers, and his great superiority of genius. For he that wrote so much and so fast would, through inadvertence and hurry, have departed from rules which he might have found in books; but his own truly poetical talent was a guide which could not suffer him to err [58]."

When he was composing his first volume, Cowper reckoned it among his principal advantages that he had read no English poetry for many years. But as the poems whereby he became known to the public were all written when he was advanced considerably beyond the middle age, he was less likely to be tinctured by the manner of any favourite author than youthful aspirants must always be. And the same cause would have prevented him from being influenced by contemporary writers, even if his habits of retired life, and the total desuetude of poetical reading for so many years had not kept him unacquainted with any thing that had been published during half a generation. If

[58] To Mr. Unwin.

there was any savour of other poets in his pieces, it was of Lloyd in some of the smaller ones, and of Churchill in his satires.

When Cowper, however, commenced author, he perceived the necessity of reading: "He that would write," said he, "should read, not that he may retail the observations of other men, but that being thus refreshed and replenished, he may find himself in a condition to make and to produce his own[59]." Just after he had finished The Task, he purchased a Latin Dictionary. "It is rather strange," said he to Mr. Unwin[60], "that at my time of life, and after a youth spent in classical pursuits, I should want one; and stranger still, that, being possessed at present of only one Latin author in the world, I should think it worth while to purchase one. I say that it is strange, and indeed I think it so myself. But I have a thought that when my present labours of the pen are ended, I may go to school again, and refresh my spirits by a little intercourse with the Mantuan and the Sabine bards; and perhaps by a reperusal of some others, whose works we generally lay by at that period of life when we are best qualified to read them,—when the judgement and the taste being formed, their beauties are least likely to be overlooked."—"I have bought a great dictionary," he says to Mr. Newton[61], "and want nothing but Latin authors to furnish me with the use of it. Had I purchased them first, I had begun at the right end; but I could not afford it. I beseech you admire my

[59] To Mr. Unwin, Nov. 26, 1781.
[60] July 3, 1784.
[61] July 5, 1784.

prudence." Horace was the Latin author which he possessed: but he had borrowed Virgil from one neighbour, and Homer, with a Clavis, from another, and had had them for some years.

His English reading at that time was upon scarcely a wider scale. "My studies," he says, "are very much confined, and of little use, because I have no books but what I borrow, and nobody will lend me a memory: my own is almost worn out. I read the Biographia and the Review. If all the readers of the former had memories like mine, the compilers of that work would in vain have laboured to rescue the great names of past ages from oblivion; for what I read to-day, I forget to-morrow. A by-stander might say, 'this is rather an advantage, the book is always new.' But I beg the by-stander's pardon: I can recollect, though I cannot remember; and with the book in my hand I recognise those passages, which, without the book, I should never have thought of more. The Review pleases me most, because if the contents escape me, I regret them less, being a very supercilious reader of most modern writers. Either I dislike the subject, or the manner of treating it; the style is affected, or the matter is disgusting[62]."

But in one of these points Cowper depreciated himself, and in the other he wronged himself. There are indications enough in his poems of a practical and retentive memory; and the facility with which he composed Latin verses, after so many years disuse, is proof not only that he had been well taught, but that

[62] To Mr. Newton, April 20, 1783.

he well remembered what he had once learned. Neither was he so fastidious a reader as he represented himself to be, and as he formerly had been. There is a time of life at which men of genius, .. and still more men of talents, .. are likely to be so, when they are fully aware of their own powers, and have not attained the knowledge of their own deficiencies. They are then more disposed to descry faults in a book, however good, and to seek in it for matter of ridicule, than to learn from it and be thankful. Such a temper had prevailed in the Nonsense Club; but even poor Lloyd lived long enough to outgrow it: Colman made ample amends to Mason for his share in the mock lyrics, by bringing Elfrida and Caractacus upon the stage; and Cowper, though he accused himself of being a supercilious reader, had long before seen and acknowledged, that in proportion as he had been so in early life, his judgement had been warped by prejudice[63]. Indeed, unless he were provoked by some gross injustice of criticism, or some glaring faults in style, he was disposed to think favourably of any book that entertained him, and to rate its merits at their full value, .. certainly never to depreciate them. When he looked at the world "through the loopholes of retreat," it was from a distance at which none of its sounds were audible. He knew nothing of the public opinion concerning current literature, except what the Monthly Review told him, and sometimes the Gentleman's Magazine[64]; in this respect he exercised his own un-

[63] See vol. i. p. 262.

[64] The one he saw regularly, the other only occasionally.

biassed judgement, and if at any time the balance was not evenly held, it was when it inclined on the side of indulgence.

From the time when he "left the herd," like "a stricken deer," till he became known as the author of the Task, two and twenty years had elapsed; and in the course of those years the public had gradually and insensibly been prepared for the reception of such a poem. Public taste was at a low ebb when Cowper joined in the laugh against Gray and Mason; and the few persons who perceived and lamented that it was so, inferred that public feeling was lower than it really was, .. perhaps than it ever can be. For no corruption of taste, however prevalent, can wholly destroy in the public mind that moral sense to which true poetry appeals.

When Beattie began his Minstrel, he said he was morally certain that it never would be finished, and that he had resolved to write no more poetry, with a view to publication, till he saw some dawnings of a poetical taste among the generality of readers; of which, said he, there is not at present any thing like an appearance[65]. Gray once expressed an opinion that his Elegy owed its popularity wholly to the subject, and that the public would have received it as well if it had been written in prose[66]. This was not altogether true: for there is a charm in metre, as there is in music; it is of the same kind, though the relation may be remote; and it differs less in degree perhaps, than one who has not an ear for poetry can believe.

[65] Forbes's Life of Beattie, vol. i. p. 80. [66] Ibid. 73.

Johnson may be forgiven all the wrongful decrees which he pronounced in criticism, for having preserved this stanza[67]:

> Verse sweetens toil, however rude the sound:
> All at her work the village maiden sings;
> Nor, while she turns the giddy wheel around,
> Revolves the sad vicissitudes of things.

A sweeter stanza never was composed: but apart from the pensive reflection which is there so exquisitely expressed, what it affirms of the general influence of verse upon mankind, is a truth which all who have ears to hear may have perceived. Without songs, there could be no popular music, and without verse no songs; .. none of those melodies, which having been heard in youth, or childhood, are recalled to memory, or awaken there of themselves, in middle or old age, and with which the words and feelings and sentiments wherewith they were linked, revive also, and local recollections, and all that is connected with them. Gray's Elegy owes much of its popularity to its strain of verse; the strain of thought alone, natural and touching as it is, would never have impressed it upon the hearts of thousands and tens of thousands, unless the diction and metre in which it was embodied had been perfectly in unison with it. Beattie ascribed its general

[67] He repeated it at Nairn, upon hearing a girl sing an Erse song while she was spinning wool with a great wheel. Boswell thought he had heard the lines before. "I fancy not, sir," said Johnson; "for they are in a detached poem, the name of which I do not remember, written by one Giffard, a parson." The poem is said, in a note of Malone's, to have been hitherto undiscovered.

reception to both causes; "it is a poem," he says, "which is universally understood and admired, not only for its poetical beauties, but also, and perhaps chiefly, for its expressing sentiments in which every man thinks himself interested, and which, at certain times, are familiar to all men." Neither cause would have sufficed for producing so general and extensive and permanent an effect, unless the poem had been, in the full import of the word, harmonious.

The same causes, and the same combination, rendered the Task more popular than any other poem of equal length in the English language. Its religious character, no doubt, contributed largely to its circulation, by carrying it among a numerous and growing class of readers, for whom that character constituted its chief attraction. But this was rather a powerful assistant than a primary cause of its success; which was as immediate as it was complete. Except the Rosciad, there had probably been no instance of a poem obtaining so rapidly a great reputation: but the Rosciad was written by a man of the town, who had no worthier object in view than that of producing something which might become the town talk; it was addressed to those who frequented Vanity Fair, and was not expected to have any interest beyond the precincts of that fair, nor to retain it longer than while the fair lasted: the Task was the work of a reflective, melancholy mind, employed in retirement upon topics in which there was no novelty, and which, it might have been thought, though they never could become obsolete, were likely to excite little attention in what is called the world. That it must one day be

appreciated as it deserved, a competent reader might have pronounced without hesitation; the immediate acceptation which it obtained was what the most sanguine friend of the author could not have anticipated, nor had the author himself regarded it as a possibility in any dream of hope.

But the poem appeared, .. if the expression may be permitted, .. just at the fullness of time, when the way had been prepared for it. A taste for descriptive poetry, of which none was produced in the school of Pope and Dryden, and which professional critics had vilified and condemned, had been revived by Thomson. So little was it favoured in his time, that it was long before he could find a publisher for his Winter (the first part of the Seasons that was printed); and when, upon Mallet's recommendation, a bookseller ventured to print it, the impression lay like waste paper in his warehouse, and was in danger of being sold as such, when one Mr. Whatley, .. (his name deserves to be recorded) happened to take up a copy which was lying on the publisher's stall. He was a lover of poetry, and, as it appears, a man of reputation among town wits, for he brought the poem into notice by spreading its praise through the coffee-houses; and the edition was sold in consequence of the zeal with which he commended a poem good enough to bear out his commendation.

Other poets also had, in different lines, and with more or less success, introduced a taste for something different from the conventional poetry of the dominant school. Glover's Leonidas, though only party spirit could have extolled it as a work of genius, obtained

no inconsiderable sale, and a reputation[68] which flourished for half a century. It has a place now in the two great general collections, and deserves to hold it. The author has the merit of having departed from bad models, rejected all false ornaments and tricks of style, and trusted to the dignity of his subject. And though the poem is cold and bald, stately rather than strong in its best parts, and in general rather stiff than stately, there is in its very nakedness a sort of Spartan severity that commands respect.

Another proof that the school of Pope was gradually losing its influence is, that almost every poem of any considerable length, which obtained any celebrity during the half century between Pope and Cowper, was written in blank verse. With the single exception of Falconer's Shipwreck, it would be in vain to look for any rhymed poem of that age and of equal extent which is held in equal estimation with the works of Young, Thomson, Glover, Somervile, Dyer, Akenside, and Armstrong. Johnson said truly, that "rhyme can never be spared, but when the subject is able to support itself[69]:" but he was never more mistaken, nor did he ever advance an opinion

[68] In a letter dated May, 1737, Swift asks Pope, "Who is that Mr. Glover, who wrote the poem called Leonidas, which is reprinting here, and hath great vogue?" Pope's answer does not appear: "it would have been curious," says Dr. Warton, "to have known his opinion concerning a poem that is written in a taste and manner so different from his own, in a style formed on the Grecian school, and with the simplicity of an ancient."—*Essay on Pope*, p. 401.

[69] Life of Milton.

which is more directly disproved, than when he asserted that "those who hope to please, must condescend to rhyme[70]."

Gray and Mason are among the writers who, by raising the tone of poetry, contributed to excite a taste for something better than the school of Pope. In one of his first poems, Mason had in a puerile fiction, ranked Chaucer and Spenser and Milton below Pope, which is like comparing a garden shrub with the oaks of the forest. But he would have maintained no such absurdity in his riper years, for Mason lived to perceive and correct both his errors of opinion, and his faults of style. It was something in that sickly age of tragedy to produce two such dramas as Elfrida and Caractacus; the success of which, when Colman (much to his honour) made the bold experiment of bringing them on the stage, proved that although the public had long been dieted upon trash, they could relish something of a worthier kind than Tamerlane, the Revenge, and the Grecian Daughter. Mason composed his plays upon an artificial model, and in a gorgeous diction, because he thought Shakespeare had precluded all hope of excellence in any other form of drama. He has ingenuously confessed that he was too much elated by popular applause; but he did not allow his judgement to be warped by supposing that what the public had applauded must necessarily be good. He learned to think that the romantic or mixed drama is that which is best suited to the English stage, and he gradually weeded his style.

The piece which he composed upon what he called

[70] Life of Milton.

"the old English model," lay by him some thirty years, and was not published till towards the close of his life. He was the only person in those days who ventured to follow our old dramatists; for the revival of Shakespeare's plays upon the stage produced no visible effect upon contemporary play-wrights. But when Garrick had made the name of Shakespeare popular, a race of Shakespearean commentators arose, who introduced a sort of taste for the books of Shakespeare's age; and as they worked in the rubbish, buried treasures, of which they were not in search, were brought to light, for those who could understand their value. Thus, though in their cumbrous annotations, the last labourer always added more rubbish to the heaps which his predecessors had accumulated, they did good service by directing attention to our earlier literature. The very homage which they paid to Shakespeare tended to impress the multitude with an opinion of the paramount importance of his works, and a belief in excellencies of which they could have no perception. They who had any books for show considered Shakespeare, from this time, as a necessary part of the furniture of their shelves. Even the Jubilee, and its after representation at the theatres, contributed to confirm this useful persuasion. Thousands who had not seen one of his plays, nor read a line of them, heard of Shakespeare, and understood that his name was one of those of which it became Englishmen to be proud.

Two works which appeared in the interval between Churchill and Cowper, promoted, beyond any others, this growth of a better taste than had prevailed for the hundred years preceding. These were Warton's His-

tory of English Poetry, and Percy's Reliques, the publication of which must form an epoch in the continuation of that history. They only who have made themselves well acquainted with the current poetry and criticism of those days, can understand or imagine how thoroughly both had been corrupted and debased. Books which are now justly regarded as among the treasures of English literature, which are the delight of the old and the young, the learned and the unlearned, the high and the low, were then spoken of with contempt; the Pilgrim's Progress as fit only for the ignorant and vulgar, Robinson Crusoe for children; and if any one but an angler condescended to look in Izaak Walton[71], it must be for the sake of finding something in the book to laugh at! And for Spenser, .. if the tiresome uniformity of his measure did not render the Faery Queen insupportable, that poem would be laid down in disgust almost as soon as it was taken up, because of the filthy images and loathsome allegories with which it abounds! These things were said, .. and said by those who had seated themselves in the chair of the critic, and assumed the office of directing and controlling public taste!

Even those who found some attractions in the imagery and story of this great poem, complained of its versification and its style. "It is great pity," said Oldmixon, "Spenser fell into that kind of versifying; and very odd that after it had been so generally and justly condemned, a poet in our time should think to

[71] The Monthly Reviewers, in 1777, said, "we have sometimes amused ourselves by dipping into honest Izaak Walton's Complete Angler, merely as a *rum* book."

acquire merit by imitating it. The ruff and the fardingale might as well be renewed in dress, as the long stanza in poetry, where the sense is fettered up in eight or ten lines." One gentleman, being indued with a spirit of perverse industry and stupid perseverance, in which if he has ever been equalled, he has assuredly never been outdone, transposed the whole of the Faery Queen into blank verse. Luckily for himself he was prudent enough to publish only the first canto as a specimen; the reason which he assigned for his undertaking was, that he "wished to render the poem more intelligible, having met with many persons, who, whilst they admired the imagery, invention, and sentiments of the author, did not choose to be at the pains to seek for them amongst his uncouth phrases and obsolete style!"

Yet in this stanza Thomson had composed the Castle of Indolence, and Shenstone his Schoolmistress, each being very far the best work of its author; and the publication of Percy's Reliques gave birth to a third poem in the same delightful measure, which though the author, failing to work out his own conception, left it imperfect, will nevertheless hold its place with these, centuries hence, when time shall have winnowed the wheat in our granaries from the chaff, and purged the floor:.. it was upon reading Percy's preliminary Dissertation, that Beattie conceived the intention of writing his Minstrel. No poem has ever given more delight to minds of a certain class, and in a certain stage of their progress,.. that class a high one, and that stage perhaps the most delightful in the course of their pilgrimage. It was to this class that the poet him-

self belonged; the scenes which he delineated were those in which he had grown up, the feelings and aspirations those of his own boyhood and youth, and the poem derived its peculiar charm from its truth.

This was an incidental effect of Percy's volumes. Their immediate consequence was to produce a swarm of "legendary tales," bearing, in their style, about as much resemblance to the genuine ballad, as the heroes of a French tragedy to the historical personages whose names they bear, or a set of stage-dancers to the lads and lasses of a village green, in the old times of the May-pole. But they were written by persons who had been trained in a bad school, and could not unlearn the lessons they had been taught. The more tricksey they were, and the more mawkish, the more they were extolled by contemporary critics; but they passed away with their generation; and it was seen in the next, how great a benefit Percy and Warton had conferred upon the young lovers and votaries of the art, by directing their attention to the early poets.

Cowper's Task appeared in the interval, when young minds were prepared to receive it, and at a juncture when there was no poet of any great ability, or distinguished name in the field. Gray and Akenside were dead. Mason was silent. Glover, brooding over his Athenaid, was regarded as belonging to an age that was past. Churchill was forgotten. Emily and Bampfylde had been cut off in the blossom of their youth. Crabbe, having, by the publication of his Library, his Village, and his Newspaper, accomplished his heart's immediate desire, sought at that time for

no farther publicity; and Hayley ambled over the course without a competitor. There never was a season at which such a poem could have appeared with more advantage; and perhaps there never was a poem of which the immediate success, as well as the permanent estimation might with so much certainty have been predicted. The subject, or rather the occasion, of the poem had been fortuitous; and the key in which it was pitched, as being best suited to the theme, was precisely that which enabled the poet to exhibit the whole compass of his powers. It is remarkable that the work on which Cowper's fame is founded, should commence in a strain bearing no remote similarity to the earliest of his pieces which has been preserved. That piece was in imitation of the Splendid Shilling; the present theme was not, indeed, base in itself, but it could only be treated with playful gravity, which would have lost half its effect in any other measure than blank verse; and yet from a clear perception of its difficulties[72], and the facility which he had acquired of composing in rhyme, Cowper would

[72] After the Task was finished, he says to Mr. Newton, "I do not mean to write blank verse again. Not having the music of rhymes, it requires so close an attention to the pause and the cadence, and such a peculiar mode of expression, as render it, to me at least, the most difficult species of poetry that I have ever meddled with."—Nov. 27, 1784.

His meaning must have related only to original composition, for he had then begun his translation. He had said before to Mr. Unwin, (Oct. 20, 1784,) "I do not intend to write any more blank verse. It is more difficult than rhyme, and not so amusing in the composition."

not have fixed upon that metre for any premeditated plan. But having thus pitched it, excursive as the poem became, it enabled him to rise and fall with the subject, and passing in easy and graceful transition

From grave to gay, from lively to severe,

give to one of the most diversified poems in the language, the tone and character of an harmonious whole.

The Task was at once descriptive, moral, and satirical. The descriptive parts every where bore evidence of a thoughtful mind and a gentle spirit, as well as of an observant eye; and the moral sentiment which pervaded them, gave a charm in which descriptive poetry is often found wanting. The best didactic poems, when compared with the Task, are like formal gardens in comparison with woodland scenery. "One of his intimate friends," says Hayley, "had written in the first volume of his poems the following passage from the younger Pliny, as descriptive of the book: '*Multa tenuiter, multa sublimiter, multa venusté, multa teneré, multa dulciter, multa cum bile.*' Many passages are delicate, many sublime, many beautiful, many tender, many sweet, many acrimonious. Cowper was pleased with the application, and candidly said, 'The latter part is very true indeed! Yes, yes, there are *multa cum bile*[73].'" He was in a happier state of mind, and in more cheerful circumstances, when he began the Task: it was therefore less acrimonious. Its satire is altogether free from personality; it is the satire not of a sour and discontented spirit, but of a

[73] Vol. i. p. 261.

benevolent though melancholy mind; and the melancholy was not of a kind to affect artificial gloom and midnight musings, but rather to seek and find relief in sunshine, in the beauties of nature, in books and leisure, in solitary or social walks, and in the comforts of a quiet fire-side.

"What there is of a religious cast," says Cowper, "I have thrown towards the end of it, for two reasons; first, that I might not revolt the reader at his entrance; and secondly, that my best impressions might be made last. Were I to write as many poems as Lope de Vega, or Voltaire, not one of them would be without this tincture. If the world like it not, so much the worse for them. I make all the concessions I can, that I may please them, but I will not please them at the expense of conscience. My descriptions are all from nature;—not one of them second-handed. My delineations of the heart are from my own experience;—not one of them borrowed from books, or in the least degree conjectural. In my numbers, which I varied as much as I could, (for blank verse without variety of numbers is no better than bladder and string,) I have imitated nobody, though sometimes perhaps there may be an apparent resemblance; because at the same time that I would not imitate, I have not affectedly differed. —If the work cannot boast a regular plan, (in which respect however I do not think it altogether indefensible,) it may yet boast that the reflections are naturally suggested always by the preceding passage; and that, except the fifth book, which is rather of a political aspect, the whole has one tendency,—to discounte-

nance the modern enthusiasm after a London life, and to recommend rural ease and leisure as friendly to the cause of piety and virtue[74]."

If the world had not liked his poem, the world must have been worse than it is. But Cowper himself, perhaps, was not aware of what it was that supplied the place of plan, and with happier effect than the most skilful plan could have produced. There are no passages in a poet's works which are more carped at while he lives, than those wherein he speaks of himself; and if he has any readers after his death, there are none then which are perused with greater interest. In the Task there is nothing which could be carped at on that score, even by a supercilious critic, and yet the reader feels that the poet is continually present; he becomes intimately acquainted with him, and this it is which gives to this delightful poem its unity and its peculiar charm.

[74] To Mr. Unwin, Oct. 10, 1784.

CHAP. XIII.

TRANSLATION OF HOMER. LADY HESKETH COMES TO OLNEY. REMOVAL TO THE VILLAGE OF WESTON.

In a letter to Lady Hesketh, written soon after the renewal of their correspondence, Cowper says, "Now, my dear, I am going to tell you a secret: it is a great secret, that you must not whisper even to your cat. No creature is at this moment apprized of it, but Mrs. Unwin and her son. I am making a new translation of Homer, and am on the point of finishing the twenty-first book of the Iliad. The reasons upon which I undertake this Herculean labour, and by which I justify an enterprise in which I seem so effectually anticipated by Pope, (although, in fact, he has not anticipated me at all,) I may possibly give you, if you wish for them, when I can find nothing more interesting to say[1]."

It appears from the same letter, that he began this translation on the 12th of November, 1784, which was as soon as he had completed his labours for the second volume of his Poems, by finishing the piece entitled Tirocinium. So much as a week could not have elapsed between the completion of one undertaking, and the commencement of this most laborious of his works. But he had now learned the art of self-management, and was able steadily to practise it; he knew how necessary it was to have some regular employ-

[1] Nov. 9, 1785.

Wr. Obliged & faithfull Servt

H. Hesketh

From a Profile in the possession of Sir Thomas Hesketh, Bart.

ment which should occupy his mind, without exciting it.

Some pleasure he took in surprising his friends with his productions, but he had further motives for reticence in this case. "Till I had made," he says, "such a progress in my present undertaking as to put it out of all doubt, that, if I lived, I should proceed in and finish it, I kept the matter to myself. It would have done me little honour to have told my friends that I had an arduous enterprise in hand, if afterwards I must have told them that I had dropped it[2]." Few men, however, would have been better warranted by experience in relying upon their own perseverance. "Tully's rule, '*Nulla dies sine lineâ*,'" said he, "will make a volume in less time than one would suppose. I adhered to it so rigidly, (in composing the Task,) that though more than once I found three lines as many as I had time to compass, still I wrote; and finding occasionally, and as it might happen, a more fluent vein, the abundance of one day made me amends for the barrenness of another[3]." He had worked at it sometimes an hour a day, sometimes half a one, and sometimes two hours[4]. But his translation was performed by piece-work; he set himself forty lines[5] for

[2] To Mr. Hill, Dec. 24, 1785.

[3] To Mr. Newton, Nov. 27, 1784. [4] Oct. 30, 1784.

[5] Twice the length of an ordinary imposition at Westminster, with the additional difference of translating into blank verse instead of literal prose. Some of my readers will call to mind, as I do, the look, and the tone of voice, and the movement of the head with which Dr. Vincent used to pronounce his ordinary morning sentence of "twenty lines of Homer, and not go to breakfast."

his daily task, and never excused himself from that task when it was possible to perform it. "Equally sedulous," said he, "I am in the matter of transcribing, so that between both, my morning and evening are most part completely engaged[6]."

Of all books which are used in schools, the Iliad and Odyssey are those which are read with most pleasure, and consequently make the deepest impression upon a boy's imagination; and this is less because the boy does not begin to read them consecutively till they have become easy to him, and he is of an age to enter into their spirit; than because of their intrinsic interest, the perfect beauty of their style, and the charm of truth and nature in which they incomparably excel all other poems of their kind. "John," says Cowper, in a playful message[7] to one of his friend Unwin's sons, "John, once the Little, but now almost the Great, and promising to be altogether such in time, make yourself master of the Iliad and of the Odyssey as soon as you can; and then you will be master of the two finest poems that ever were composed by man, and composed in the finest language that ever man uttered. All languages of which I know any thing, are gibberish compared with Greek."

It has already been mentioned[8] that Cowper went through both the Homeric Poems at Westminster, with a chosen companion, who was as capable as himself of enjoying them; and that he had read them critically in the Temple, comparing them with Pope's translation as he proceeded. His love and admiration

[6] To Mr. Unwin, Oct. 22, 1785.

[7] June 12, 1785.

[8] Vol. i. p. 106.

of the original had increased in proportion to his distaste of a version which so thoroughly disguises it; and it was the vivid remembrance of those feelings, quickened by the continual pleasure which he found in perusing the Iliad, that induced him to undertake the arduous task of translating it himself. The distrust which he felt at first of his own perseverance, gave way when he approached the end of the Iliad. "I shall assuredly proceed," said he, "because the farther I go, the more I find myself justified in the undertaking; and in due time, if I live, I shall assuredly publish. In the whole I shall have composed above forty thousand verses, about which forty thousand verses I shall have taken great pains, on no occasion suffering a slovenly line to escape me. I leave you to guess, therefore, whether, such a labour once achieved, I shall not determine to turn it to some account, and to give myself profit if I can, if not at least some credit, for my reward[9]." Accordingly he took measures for making his intention known among his friends, and preparing the public for it.

This resolution he announced to Lady Hesketh. "Although," said he, "I do not suspect that a secret to you, my cousin, is any burthen, yet having maturely considered that point since I wrote my last, I feel myself altogether disposed to release you from the injunction, to that effect, under which I laid you. I have now made such a progress in my translation, that I need neither fear I shall stop short of the end, nor that any other rider of Pegasus should overtake me. Therefore, if at any time it should fall fairly in your way, or

[9] To Mr. Unwin, Oct. 22, 1785.

you should feel yourself invited to say I am so occupied, you have my poetship's free permission [10]." He did not like the booksellers well enough, he said, to make them a present of such a labour, and he intended to publish by subscription. His cousin had offered him pecuniary assistance for his next publication, whatever it might be; he asked her on this occasion for her vote and interest, if she pleased, but nothing more.

In communicating his purpose to Mr. Newton [11], he related in what manner he had imperceptibly, as it were, engaged in so arduous an undertaking. "Employment, and with the pen," said he, "is, through habit, become essential to my well-being; and to produce always original poems, especially of considerable length, is not so easy. For some weeks after I had finished the Task, and sent away the last sheet corrected, I was through necessity idle, and suffered not a little in my spirits for being so. One day, being in such distress of mind as was hardly supportable, I took up the Iliad; and merely to divert attention, and with no more preconception [12] of what I was then entering upon, than I have at this moment of what I shall be doing this day twenty years hence, translated the twelve first lines of it. The same necessity pressing me again, I had recourse to the same expedient, and translated more. Every day bringing its occasion for employment with it, every day consequently added something to the work; till at last I began to reflect

[10] Hayley, vol. ii. p. 143. The letter is without a date.

[11] Dec. 3, 1785.

[12] This shows, what indeed might be inferred from other circumstances, that Hayley was mistaken (vol. i. 265,) in ascribing to Lady Austen the suggestion of this work.

thus:—The Iliad and the Odyssey together consist of about forty thousand verses. To translate these forty thousand verses will furnish me with occupation for a considerable time. I have already made some progress, and I find it a most agreeable amusement. Homer, in point of purity, is a most blameless writer; and, though he was not an enlightened man, has interspersed many great and valuable truths throughout both his poems. In short, he is in all respects a most venerable old gentleman, by an acquaintance with whom no man can disgrace himself. The literati are all agreed to a man, that, although Pope has given us two pretty poems under Homer's titles, there is not to be found in them the least portion of Homer's spirit, nor the least resemblance of his manner. I will try, therefore, whether I cannot copy him somewhat more happily myself. I have at least the advantage of Pope's faults and failings, which, like so many buoys upon a dangerous coast, will serve me to steer by, and will make my chance for success more probable. These, and many other considerations, but especially a mind that abhorred a vacuum as its chief bane, impelled me so effectually to the work, that ere long I mean to publish proposals for a subscription to it, having advanced so far as to be warranted in doing so. I have connexions, and no few such, by means of which I have the utmost reason to expect that a brisk circulation may be procured; and if it should prove a profitable enterprise, the profit will not accrue to a man who may be said not to want it. It is a business such as it will not, indeed, lie much in your way to promote; but, among your numerous connexions, it is

possible that you may know some who would sufficiently interest themselves in such a work to be not unwilling to subscribe to it. I do not mean—far be it from me—to put you upon making hazardous applications, where you might possibly incur a refusal, that would give you though but a moment's pain. You know best your own opportunities and powers in such a cause. If you can do but little, I shall esteem it much; and if you can do nothing, I am sure that it will not be for want of a will."

Cowper availed himself of the Gentleman's Magazine to produce upon the readers of that always respectable journal an impression favourable for his design. Addressing a letter to the immortal Mr. Urban, he began by saying that a lady of fine understanding and taste, and conversant with our best writers, had recently perused Pope's Homer, which she had not looked into for many years before; and on finishing the perusal, she had asked his opinion of it, expressing at the same time no small degree of disappointment, and some suspicion that prejudice had operated not a little in favour of the original. "For my own part," said he, "I have ever been among the warmest admirers of the Grecian, whose works, in my mind, in point of variety and sublimity of conception, and dignity of expression, remain to this day unrivalled. I accordingly felt myself a little piqued at her insinuation; and having, some years since, made an accurate comparison of Pope with Homer, throughout both his poems, I with the more confidence addressed myself to the task of his vindication: and not doubting that most English readers must of necessity have conceived

of him infinitely below his worth, I beg leave, through the medium of your Magazine, to give my sentiments upon the subject a more extensive circulation than they can otherwise have. I feel a double pleasure in doing it. I consider it not only as an opportunity to assert the honour of my favourite bard, but the good sense and justice of their suffrages also who have crowned him with such abundant applause as my female friend finds it difficult to account for."

Giving then to Pope his praise as a poet, in whose original works he found every species of poetical merit, he proceeded to account for the faults of his translation. "Fame," he said, "had not been his principal motive, otherwise, with his abilities, he would never have condescended to let others participate in the undertaking. His connexions were many, his avocations were frequent; he was obliged to have recourse to assistance; sometimes to write hastily and rather carelessly himself; and often, no doubt, either through delicacy or precipitance, to admit such lines of his coadjutors, as not only dishonoured Homer, but his translator also." The main cause, however, lay in the measure which he had chosen. "Pope was a most excellent rhymist; that is to say, he had the happiest talent at accommodating his sense to his rhyming occasions. To discover homotonous words in a language abounding with them like ours, is a task that would puzzle no man competently acquainted with it. But for such accommodation as I have mentioned, when an author is to be translated, there is little room; the sense is already determined; rhyme, therefore, must, in many cases, occasion, even to the most expert

in the art, an almost unavoidable necessity to depart from the meaning of the original; for Butler's remark is as true as it is ludicrous, that

> —— Rhyme the rudder is of verses,
> With which, like ships, they steer their courses.

Accordingly, in numberless instances, we may observe in Pope a violation of Homer's sense, of which he certainly had never been guilty, had not the chains with which he had bound himself constrained him."

The letter-writer treated next upon the barbarous effect of shortening proper names; "blank verse," he observed, "being of loftier construction, would have afforded sufficient room for Idomeneus and Meriones, with several others, to have stood upright,—instead of being shortened by the foot. "But rhyme has another unhappy effect upon a poem of such length; it admits not of a sufficient variety in the pause and cadence. The ear is fatigued with the sameness of the numbers, and satiated with a tune, musical indeed, but for ever repeated. Here then was an error in the outset. It is to be lamented, but not to be wondered at. For who can wonder, since all men are naturally fond of that in which they excel, that Pope, who managed the bells of rhyme with more dexterity than any man, should have tied them about Homer's neck? Yet Pope, when he composed an epic poem himself, wrote it in blank verse, aware, no doubt, of its greater suitableness, both in point of dignity and variety, to the grandeur of such a work. And though Atterbury advised him to burn it, and it was burned accordingly, I will venture to say that it did not incur that doom by the want of rhyme.

It is hardly necessary for me to add, after what I have said on this part of the subject, that Homer must have suffered infinitely in the English representation that we have of him. Sometimes his sense is suppressed, sometimes other sense is obtruded upon him; rhyme gives the word, a miserable transformation ensues; instead of Homer in the graceful habit of his age and nation, we have Homer in a straight waistcoat.

"The spirit and the manner of an author are terms that may, I think, be used conversely. The spirit gives birth to the manner, and the manner is an indication of the spirit. Homer's spirit was manly, bold, sublime. Superior to the practice of those little arts by which a genius like Ovid's seeks to amuse his readers, he contented himself with speaking the thing as it was, deriving a dignity from his plainness, to which writers more studious of ornament can never attain. If you meet with a metaphorical expression in Homer, you meet with a rarity indeed. I do not say that he has none, but I assert that he has very few. Scriptural poetry excepted, I believe that there is not to be found in the world poetry so simple as his. Is it thus with his translator? I answer, no; but exactly the reverse. Pope is no where more figurative in his own pieces than in his translation of Homer. I do not deny that his flowers are beautiful, at least they are often such; but they are modern discoveries, and of English growth. The Iliad and the Odyssey, in his hands, have no more of the air of antiquity than if he had himself invented them. Their simplicity is overwhelmed with a profusion of fine things, which, however they may strike the eye at first sight, make

no amends for the greater beauties which they conceal. The venerable Grecian is as much the worse for his acquisitions of this kind, as a statue by Phidias or Praxiteles would be for the painter's brush. The man might give to it the fashionable colours of the day, the colour of the Emperor's eye, or of the hair of the Queen of France, but he would fill up those fine strokes of the artist which he designed should be the admiration of all future ages."

He then adduced instances in which Pope had injured the original by loading it with false ornaments, or weakened it by false delicacy, occasioning thereby "a flatness in the English Homer, that never occurs in the Greek. Homer's heroes," said he, "respected their gods just as much as the Papists respect their idols. While their own cause prospered, they were a very good sort of gods; but a reverse of fortune taking place, they treated them with a familiarity nothing short of blasphemy. These outrages Pope has diluted with such a proportion of good christian meekness, that all the spirit of the old bard is quenched entirely. In like manner the invective of his heroes is often soothed and tamed away so effectually, that, instead of the smartness and acrimony of the original, we find nothing but the milkiness of the best good manners. In nice discrimination of character Homer is excelled by none; but his translator makes the persons of his poems speak all one language; they are all alike stately, pompous, stiff. In Homer we find accuracy without littleness, ease without negligence, grandeur without ostentation, sublimity without labour. I do not find them in Pope. He is often turgid, often

tame, often careless, and—to what cause it was owing I will not even surmise—upon many occasions has given an interpretation of whole passages utterly beside their meaning.

"If my fair countrywomen," he concluded, "will give a stranger credit for so much intelligence, novel at least to them, they will know hereafter whom they have to thank for the weariness with which many of them have toiled through Homer; they may rest assured that the learned, the judicious, the polite scholars of all nations have not been, to a man, mistaken and deceived; but that Homer, whatever figure he may make in English, is in himself entitled to the highest praise that his most sanguine admirers have bestowed upon him."

The letter was signed Alethes[13]. In the next number of the Magazine the editor introduced a citation from Say's Essays, wherein Pope's version of the passage describing in a simily a moonlight night, was critically examined, .. a passage which being one of the very worst in the whole translation, as equally false to the original and to nature, is that which has been most praised. "I may, therefore, reasonably conclude," says Cowper[14], "that Nichols, who makes the quotation, is on my side also. I do not know that Pope's work was ever more roughly handled than by myself, upon this occasion; yet, although the Magazine be a field in which disputants upon all questions contend, no one has hitherto enlisted himself in Pope's

[13] Gentleman's Magazine, Aug. 1785. It is printed also among the Selections from that Magazine, vol. ii. pp. 273—8.

[14] To Mr. Unwin, Oct. 22, 1786.

behalf against me. The truth is, that in those points where I touched him, he is indefensible. Readers of the original know it; and all others must be conscious that whether he deserves my censure, or deserves it not, the matter is not for them to meddle with."

But though Cowper delivered his opinion thus freely in his letters, and under a fictitious signature in the Magazine, he was prudent enough not to provoke hostility in his Proposals. "I did," said he to Hill[15], "as you suppose, bestow all possible consideration on the subject of an apology for my Homerican undertaking. I turned the matter about in my mind a hundred different ways, and in every way in which it would present itself found it an impracticable business. It is impossible for me, with what delicacy soever I may manage it, to state the objections that lie against Pope's translation, without incurring odium and the imputation of arrogance; foreseeing this danger, I choose to say nothing."

Upon imparting his intention to Johnson, and asking his advice and information on the subject of proposals for a subscription, the bookseller in reply[16] disapproved of the intended mode, and offered to treat with him, adding that he could make offers which he thought

[15] April 5, 1786.

[16] Dr. Johnson would have agreed in opinion with his namesake. "He," said he, "that asks subscription soon finds that he has enemies. All who do not encourage him, defame him. He that wants money will rather be thought angry than poor: and he that wishes to save his money conceals his avarice by his malice."—*Life of Pope.*

This is looking at the dark side,—and in a matter wherein enmity can do little, and good will may effect much.

would be approved. Cowper, however, persisted in his intention. "A subscription," said he, "is surely on every account the most eligible mode of publication. When I shall have emptied the purses of my friends, and of their friends, into my own, I am still free to levy contributions upon the world at large, and I shall then have a fund to defray the expenses of a new edition[17]." He had already received great encouragement at his outset. "At Westminster," said he to Lady Hesketh[18], "I was much intimate with Walter Bagot, a brother of Lord Bagot. In the course as I suppose of more than twenty years after we left school, I saw him but twice; once when I called on him at Oxford, and once when he called on me in the Temple. He has a brother who lives about four miles from hence, a man of large estate. It happened that soon after the publication of my first volume, he came into this country on a visit to his brother. Having read my book, and liking it, he took that opportunity to renew his acquaintance with me. I felt much affection for him; and the more, because it was plain, that after so long a time he still retained his for me. He is now at his brother's; twice he visited me in the course of last week, and this morning he brought Mrs. Bagot with him. He is a good and amiable man, and she a most agreeable woman. At this second visit I made him acquainted with my translation of Homer; he was highly pleased to find me so occupied, and with all that glow of friendship that would make it criminal in me to doubt his sincerity for a moment, insisted upon being employed in promoting the subscription, and

[17] To Lady Hesketh, Jan. 10, 1786. [18] Nov. 30, 1785.

engaged himself and all his connexions, which are extensive, and many of them of high rank, in my service. His chariot put up at an inn in the town while he was here, and I rather wondered that at his departure he chose to walk to his chariot, and not to be taken up at the door. But when he had been gone about a quarter of an hour, his servant came with a letter, which his master had written at the inn, and which, he said, required no answer. I opened it, and found as follows:

MY GOOD FRIEND, Olney, Nov. 30, 1785.

You will oblige me by accepting this early subscription to your Homer, even before you have fixed your plan and price: which, when you have done, if you will send me a parcel of your subscription papers, I will endeavour to circulate them among my friends and acquaintance as far as I can. Health and happiness attend you. Yours ever,

WALTER BAGOT.

It contained a draft for 20*l*.

"I meet," said he, in another letter[19], "with encouragement from all quarters; such as I find need of, indeed, in an enterprise of such length and moment, but such as at the same time I find effectual. Homer is not a poet to be translated under the disadvantage of doubts and dejection." The bookseller having offered his opinion, did not persist in it when he saw that Cowper had made up his mind, with reasonable expectation of success. Cowper was in good spirits at

[19] To Mr. Unwin, Dec. 24, 1781.

the prospect. "Johnson," said he, "behaves very well, at least according to my conception of the matter, and seems sensible that I have dealt liberally with him. He wishes me to be a gainer by my labours,—in his own words, 'to put something handsome into my pocket,' and recommends two large quartos for the whole. 'He would not,' he says, 'by any means advise an extravagant price,' and has fixed it at three guineas; the half, as usual, to be paid at the time of subscribing, the remainder on delivery. 'Five hundred names,' he adds, 'at this price, will put about a thousand pounds into my purse.' I am doing my best to obtain them. I have written, I think, to all my quondam friends, except those that are dead, requiring their assistance. I have gulped and swallowed, and I have written to the Chancellor, and I have written to Colman. I now bring them both to a fair test. They can both serve me most materially, if so disposed[20]." His angry feelings towards Thurlow and Colman passed away when he had given them vent in verse; and in the case of the latter, it appears by his letter[21] to him that he had received sufficient assurance of friendly recollections.

DEAR COLMAN,

For though we have not had any intercourse for more than twenty years, I cannot find in my heart to

[20] To Mr. Unwin, Dec. 31, 1785.

[21] For this letter I am obliged to Mr. Russell, who edited the works of the English Reformers Tyndale and Frith. The discontinuance of a design which was to have comprised the writings of all the most eminent English and Scottish reformers,

address you by any other style,—and I am the rather encouraged to the use of that in which I formerly addressed you, by a piece of intelligence that I received not long since from my friend Hill, who told me that you had inquired after me of him, and had said something about an intention to write to me. I took pretty good care that you should not be ignorant of my having commenced author, by sending you my volume. The reason why I did not send you my second, was because you omitted to send me your Art of Poetry, which, in a splenetic mood I suppose, I construed into a prohibition. But Hill's subsequent information has cured me of that malady, as far as you were concerned.

Once an author, and always an author: this you know, my friend, is an axiom, and admits of no dispute. In my instance, at least, it is likely to hold good, for I have more leisure than it is possible to dispose of without writing. Accordingly I write every day, and have every day been writing, since I last published, till at last I have made such a progress in a new translation of Homer into blank verse, that I am upon the point of publishing again. Hitherto I have given away my copies: but having indulged myself in that frolic twice, I now mean to try whether it may not prove equally agreeable to get something by the bargain. I come therefore humbly to solicit your vote

is much to be regretted. It was caused by the Religious Tract Society's commencing an abridged series of their writings, and thereby compelling the publisher to desist from an undertaking which would have rendered great service to philologists and historians, as well as to ecclesiastical students. To either of these classes abridgements are worth nothing.

and interest, and to beg that you will help me in the circulation of my Proposals, for I shall publish by subscription. On such occasions, you know, a man sets every wheel in motion; and it would be strange indeed, if, not having a great many wheels to move, I should leave unattempted so important a one as yourself. As soon as I have your permission, I shall order my bookseller to send you some papers.

The news informed me of your illness, which gave me true concern, for time alone cannot efface the traces of such a friendship as I have felt for you,—no, nor even time with distance to help it. The news also told me that you were better; but to find that you are perfectly recovered, and to see it under your own hand, will give the greatest pleasure to one who can honestly subscribe himself to this day,

Your very affectionate,

Dec. 27, 1785, Olney, Bucks. WM. COWPER.

I enclose this with a letter to Johnson, my publisher, to whom I am obliged to have recourse for your address.

In reply to this he received, in his own words, "the most affectionate letter imaginable. Colman," he says, "writes to me like a brother[22]."

Perhaps no work of equal magnitude was ever commenced with so little preparation;—except the course of his former studies, indeed, there had been none. It does not appear that he ever saw any other translation than Pope's; and so entirely unprovided was he

[22] To Lady Hesketh, Jan. 31, 1786.

with books, that he translated the whole Iliad[23] with no other help than a Clavis[24]. But he "equipped himself better for this immense journey" when he revised the work; a task which was performed with so much diligence, that the first copy bore very little resemblance to the second all the way through. "You must not," said he, "imagine that I had been careless and hasty in the first instance. In truth, I had not; but in rendering so excellent a poet as Homer into our language, there are so many points to be attended to, both in respect of language and numbers, that a first attempt must be fortunate indeed, if it does not call loud for a second."

Transcribing was, of all occupations, that which Cowper disliked the most; he called it "slavish work."

[23] It must be remembered, that there was probably no other book with which Cowper was so thoroughly familiar. Johnson, after saying "it is not very likely that Pope overflowed with Greek," justly observes, that "minute inquiries into the force of words are less necessary in translating Homer than other poets, because his positions are general, and his representations natural, with very little dependence on local or temporary customs,—on those changeable scenes of artificial life, which by mingling original with accidental notions, and crowding the mind with images which time effaces, produce ambiguity in diction, and obscurity in books. To this open display of unadulterated nature it must be ascribed, that Homer has fewer passages of doubtful meaning than any other poet either in the learned or in modern languages. I have read of a man who, being, by his ignorance of Greek, compelled to gratify his curiosity with the Latin printed on the opposite page, declared that, from the rude simplicity of the lines literally rendered, he formed nobler ideas of the Homeric majesty, than from the laboured elegance of polished versions."—*Life of Pope.*

[24] To Mr. Hill, April 5, 1786.

He had no such dislike to the business of revising and correcting his verses; of this, indeed, he was never weary in his translation, except when he was called upon to alter any thing upon the suggestion of another person; then, indeed, it became the most irksome of all employments. A gentleman, whom Mr. Unwin wished to become a subscriber, desired to see a specimen of the version. "I thank you," said Cowper to his friend[25], "for all that you have said and done in my cause, and beforehand for all that you shall say and do hereafter. I am sure that there will be no deficiency on your part. In particular, I thank you for taking such jealous care of my honour and respectability when the *Mann* you mentioned applied for samples of my translation. When I deal in wine, cloth, or cheese, I will give samples; but of verse, never. No consideration would have induced me to comply with the gentleman's demand, unless he could have assured me that his wife had longed." This, however, was more livelily than considerately said, and it was not long before he thought it prudent to depart from such a resolution.

Lady Hesketh had been the means of renewing the communication between Cowper and their kinsman the General. For this purpose she made use of her cousin's works. "You did perfectly well, my dear," said Cowper, "to make Task take the lead of his elder brother, when their attendance on the General was in question. The first volume is a Confession of my Faith, concerning which he will probably not feel himself greatly interested; but the second, giving

[25] Dec. 31, 1785.

some account of my manner of life, together with other diverting matters, may possibly please him. I shall be glad if it should, for I know him to be a man of excellent taste; but at the same time do not expect him to say much." By her advice Cowper wrote to the General, being assured[26] by her that through all their years of estrangement he had never withdrawn his pecuniary assistance. The letter, though "of pretty handsome length," merely contained an explanation of his motives for undertaking the translation, and an application for his interest in procuring subscribers. The General wished to have a specimen sent him. Cowper, remembering how scornfully he had rejected a former application of the same purport, declined at first; but presently repented, and blamed himself the more when Lady Hesketh sent him a copy of the General's note to her, of which he and his publication were the chief subject, and in which his kindness was strongly expressed.

The fault was soon repaired, and he apologised for it thus to his "dearest cousin[27]," "to tell you the truth, I began to be ashamed of myself that I had opposed him in the only two measures he recommended, and then assured him that I should be glad of his advice at all times. Having put myself under a course of strict self-examination upon this subject, I found at last that all the reluctance I had felt against a compliance with his wishes proceeded from a principle of shamefacedness at bottom, that had insensibly influenced my reasonings, and determined me against the counsel of a man whom I knew to be wiser than myself. Won-

[26] See vol. i. p. 180. [27] Jan. 16, 1786.

derful as it may seem, my cousin, yet is it equally true, that although I certainly did translate the Iliad with a design to publish it when I had done; and although I have twice issued from the press already, yet do I tremble at the thought, and so tremble at it, that I could not bear to send out a specimen, because, by doing so, I should appear in public a good deal sooner than I had purposed. Thus have I developed my whole heart to you, and if you should think it at all expedient, have not the least objection to your communicating to the General this interpretation of the matter.—I am vexed, and have been these three days, that I thwarted him; but, as I told you, I have still my gloomy hours, which had their share, together with the more powerful cause assigned above, in determining my behaviour. But I have given the best proof possible of my repentance."

The portion which he selected was part of the interview between Priam and Achilles, in the last book. "I chose," said he, "to extract from the latter end of the poem, and as near to the close of it as possible, that I might encourage a hope in the readers of it, that if they found it in some degree worthy of their approbation, they would find the former part of the work not less so; for if a writer flags any where, it must be when he is near the end[28]." Thus it is that authors are sometimes apt to refine upon the effect which their compositions may produce upon the readers, not considering how little consideration they themselves bestow upon things in which they have no particular interest.

[28] To Mr. Bagot, Jan. 15, 1786.

"The General and I," said he to Lady Hesketh, "having broken the ice, are upon the most comfortable terms of correspondence. He writes very affectionately to me, and I say every thing to him that comes uppermost. I could not write frequently to any creature living, upon any other terms than these. He tells me of infirmities that he has, which make him less active than he was; I am sorry to hear that he has any such. Alas! alas! he was young when I saw him, only twenty years ago[29]!" Cowper had reached that time of life, in which upon looking back twenty years seem but as yesterday.

He was not inclined to submit his manuscript to any one for criticism, having felt the inconvenience in the case of his first volume. When Lady Hesketh advised such a measure, he replied, "My cousin, give yourself no trouble to find out any of the Magi to scrutinize my Homer. I can do without them; and if I were not conscious that I have no need of their help, I would be the first to call for it." Johnson, however, when the specimen, which had been sent to the General, came to his hands on its return, sent with it some notes thereon by a critic, whose name he did not mention, but to whom, as a man of unquestionable learning and ability, he, and the General also, wished Cowper to submit his manuscript. Pleased with the knowledge and sagacity which the remarks displayed, and not displeased with their temper, though it promised that severity of animadversion would not be spared when occasion should be found for it, he consented to let the manuscript be submitted to this unknown critic. And being in a com-

[29] Jan. 31, 1786.

plying mood, he assented also to Lady Hesketh's desire, that Maty should see one of the books; Maty had asked her leave to mention it in the next number of his Review, in which he was about to express his approbation of the Task. "This," said Cowper, "pleases me the more, because I have authentic intelligence of his being a critical character in all its forms, acute, sour, and blunt; and so incorruptible withal, and so unsusceptible of bias from undue motives, that as my correspondent informs me, he would not praise his own mother, did he not think she deserved it[30]."

"But let Maty," said he, "be the only *critic* that has any thing to do with it. The vexation, the perplexity that attends a multiplicity of criticisms by various hands, many of which are sure to be futile, many of them ill-founded, and some of them contradictory to others, is inconceivable,—except by the author, whose ill-fated work happens to be the subject of them. This also appears to me self-evident, that if a work have passed under the review of one man of taste and learning, and have had the good fortune to please him, his approbation gives security for that of all others qualified like himself. I speak thus, my dear, after having just escaped from such a storm of trouble, occasioned by endless remarks, hints, suggestions, and objections, as drove me almost to despair, and to the very verge of a resolution to drop my undertaking for ever. With infinite difficulty I at last sifted the chaff from the wheat, availed myself of what appeared to me to be just, and rejected the rest, but not till the labour and anxiety had nearly undone all that Kerr had been

[30] To Mr. Bagot, Jan. 23, 1786.

doing for me. My beloved cousin, trust me for it, as you safely may, that temper, vanity, and self-importance, had nothing to do in all this distress that I suffered. It was merely the effect of an alarm that I could not help taking, when I compared the great trouble I had with a few lines only thus handled, with that which I foresaw such handling of the whole must necessarily give me. I felt beforehand, that my constitution would not bear it."

Johnson's friend proved to be Fuseli; and Cowper, though at first sadly teased by him, soon, when they understood each other, saw reason to think that he might have gone the world through before he could have found his equal in an accurate and familiar acquaintance with the original. Fuseli, though the most caustic of men, was greatly pleased with the translation, and it is said to have derived considerable advantage from his remarks. But Maty, not a little to the vexation and surprise of Lady Hesketh, declared against it, and Cowper was hurt by his animadversions; they appeared to him unjust in part, and in part ill-natured, "and yet," says he, "the man himself being an oracle in every body's account, I apprehended that he had done me much mischief. Why he says that the translation is far from exact, is best known to himself, for I know it to be as exact as is compatible with poetry; and prose translations of Homer are not wanted[31]." Colman also made some remarks upon the specimen, "prompted," said he, "by my zeal for your success, not, Heaven knows, by arrogance or impertinence.—On the whole I admire it exceedingly, thinking it breathes

[31] May 8, 1786.

the spirit and conveys the manner of the original; though having here neither Homer nor Pope's Homer, I cannot speak precisely of particular lines or expressions, or compare your blank verse with his rhyme, except by declaring, that I think blank verse infinitely more congenial to the magnificent simplicity of Homer's hexameters, than the confined couplets and the jingle of rhyme."

Colman had shown himself in his Terence so excellent a translator, that there was no man, whose opinion upon such a specimen could be worth more. It came in good time to encourage Cowper, who had been harassed by minute criticisms, and had "altered and altered in deference to them, till at last he did not care how he altered." "When you come, my dear," said he to his cousin, "we will hang all these critics together, for they have worried me without remorse or conscience,—at least one of them has. I had actually murdered more than a few of the best lines in the specimen, in compliance with his requisitions; but plucked up my courage at last, and in the very last opportunity that I had, recovered them to life again by restoring the original reading. At the same time, I readily confess that the specimen is the better for all this discipline its author has undergone; but then it has been more indebted for its improvement to that pointed accuracy of examination to which I was myself excited, than to any proposed amendments from Mr. Critic; for as sure as you are my cousin, whom I long to see at Olney, so surely would he have done me irreparable mischief, if I would have given him leave[32]."

[32] Feb. 19, 1786.

Cowper was sufficiently aware of his own state, to know that the sort of excitement which he thus underwent in his way to the press, must appear dangerous to his relations, and that there was one of his letters to the General that would distress and alarm him. "I sent him another," he says, "that will, I hope, quiet him again. Johnson has apologized very civilly for the multitude of his friend's strictures, and his friend has promised to confine himself in future to a comparison of me with the original, so that I doubt not we shall jog on merrily together." Fuseli no doubt was made acquainted with Cowper's case, and tempered his strictures accordingly. It was fortunate that Mr. Newton[33],

[33] When the work was on the point of publication, he wrote thus to Hannah More:—"My dear friend's Homer is coming abroad. I have received my copy, but the *publication* is not yet. I have cursorily surveyed the first volume; it seems fully equal to what I expected, for my expectations were not high. I do not think it will add to the reputation of the author of the Task, as a poet; but I hope the *performance* will not be unworthy of him, though the *subject* is greatly beneath the attention of the writer, who has a mind capable of original, great, and useful things; but he could not at the time fix his thoughts upon any thing better; and they who know his state will rather pity than blame him. I hope we shall have no more translations."—*Roberts' Life of H. More*, vol. ii. p. 264.

Mrs. More agreed in opinion with him. She says, "You know my admiration of this truly great genius, but I am really grieved that he should lower his aims so far as to stoop to become a mere editor and translator. It is Ulysses shooting from a baby's bow. Why does he quit the heights of Solyma for the dreams of Pindus? 'What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba?' In his own original way he has few competitors; in his new walk he has many superiors; he can do the best things better than any man, but others can do middling things better than he."—*Ibid.* vol. ii. p. 289.

who neither thought favourably of the undertaking, nor of the execution, had prudence enough to see that some such employment was necessary for his poor friend, and therefore did not discourage him. And it is observable, that though Cowper was not aware of Mr. Newton's opinion on the subject, he wrote to him in a strain that seems intended to propitiate him. "I thank you heartily, both for your wishes and prayers, that should a disappointment occur, I may not be too much hurt by it. Strange as it may seem to say it, and unwilling as I should be to say it to any person less candid than yourself, I will nevertheless say, that I have not entered on this work, unconnected as it must needs appear with the interests of the cause of God, without the direction of his providence, nor altogether unassisted by him in the performance of it. Time will show to what it ultimately tends. I am inclined to believe that it has a tendency to which I myself am, at present, perfectly a stranger. Be that as it may, He knows my frame, and will consider that I am but dust; dust, into the bargain, that has been so trampled under foot and beaten, that a storm less violent than an unsuccessful issue of such a business might occasion, would be sufficient to blow me quite away. But I will tell you honestly, I have no fears upon the subject. My predecessor has given me every advantage.

"As I know not to what end this my present occupation may finally lead, so neither did I know, when I wrote it, or at all suspect, one valuable end, at least, that was to be answered by the Task. It has pleased God to prosper it; and being composed in blank verse,

it is likely to prove as seasonable an introduction to a blank verse Homer, by the same hand, as any that could have been devised: yet when I wrote the last line of the Task, I as little suspected that I should ever engage in a version of the old Asiatic tale, as you do now[34]."

There was another subject, however, upon which Mr. Newton did not observe the same delicacy. Cowper had told him that he expected a visit from the General as soon as the season should turn up bright and warm. "I have not seen him," said he, "these twenty years and upwards, but our intercourse having been lately revived, is likely to become closer, warmer, and more intimate than ever. Lady Hesketh also comes down in June, and if she can be accommodated with any thing in the shape of a dwelling at Olney, talks of making it always, in part, her summer habitation. It has pleased God that I should, like Joseph, be put into a well; and because there are no Midianites in the way to deliver me, therefore my friends are coming down into the well to see me[35]." The tenour of Mr. Newton's remarks upon this intelligence may be understood from Cowper's letter in reply.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

MY DEAR FRIEND, May 20, 1786.

Within this hour arrived three sets of your new publication[36], for which we sincerely thank you. We have breakfasted since they came, and consequently, as you may suppose, have neither of us had yet an opportunity to make ourselves acquainted with the

[34] Feb. 18, 1786. [35] April 1, 1786. [36] Messiah.

contents. I shall be happy (and when I say that, I mean to be understood in the fullest and most emphatical sense of the word) if my frame of mind shall be such as may permit me to study them. But Adam's approach to the Tree of Life, after he had sinned, was not more effectually prohibited by the flaming sword that turned every way, than mine to its great Antetype has been now almost these thirteen years, a short interval of three or four days, which passed about this time twelvemonth, alone excepted. For what reason it is that I am thus long excluded, if I am ever again to be admitted, is known to God only. I can say but this: that if he is still my Father, his paternal severity has, toward me, been such as that I have reason to account it unexampled. For though others have suffered desertion, yet few, I believe, for so long a time, and perhaps none a desertion accompanied with such experiences. But they have this belonging to them: that as they are not fit for recital, being made up merely of infernal ingredients, so neither are they susceptible of it; for I know no language in which they could be expressed. They are as truly things which it is not possible for man to utter, as those were which Paul heard and saw in the Third Heaven. If the ladder of Christian experience reaches, as I suppose it does, to the very presence of God, it has nevertheless its foot in the abyss. And if Paul stood, as no doubt he did, in that experience of his to which I have just alluded, on the topmost round of it, I have been standing, and still stand on the lowest, in this thirteenth year that has passed since I descended. In such a situation of mind, encompassed by the midnight of

absolute despair, and a thousand times filled with unspeakable horror, I first commenced an author. Distress drove me to it; and the impossibility of subsisting without some employment, still recommends it. I am not, indeed, so perfectly hopeless as I was; but I am equally in need of an occupation, being often as much, and sometimes even more, worried than ever. I cannot amuse myself, as I once could, with carpenters' or with gardeners' tools, or with squirrels and guinea-pigs. At that time I was a child. But since it has pleased God, whatever else he withholds, to restore to me a man's mind, I have put away childish things. Thus far, therefore, it is plain that I have not chosen or prescribed to myself my own way, but have been providentially led to it; perhaps I might say, with equal propriety, compelled and scourged into it: for certainly, could I have made my choice, or were I permitted to make it even now, those hours which I spend in poetry I would spend with God. But it is evidently his will that I should spend them as I do, because every other way of employing them he himself continues to make impossible. If, in the course of such an occupation, or by inevitable consequence of it, either my former connexions are revived, or new ones occur, these things are as much a part of the dispensation as the leading points of it themselves; the effect, as much as the cause. If his purposes in thus directing me are gracious, he will take care to prove them such in the issue; and, in the mean time, will preserve me (for he is as able to do that in one condition of life as in another) from all mistakes in conduct that might prove pernicious to myself, or give reasonable offence to

others. I can say it as truly as it was ever spoken,—Here I am: let him do with me as seemeth him good.

At present, however, I have no connexions, at which either you, I trust, or any who love me and wish me well, have occasion to conceive alarm. Much kindness indeed I have experienced at the hands of several, some of them near relations, others not related to me at all; but I do not know that there is among them a single person from whom I am likely to catch contamination. I can say of them all, with more truth than Jacob uttered when he called kid venison, "The Lord thy God brought them unto me." I could show you among them two men, whose lives, though they have but little of what we call evangelical light, are ornaments to a Christian country; men who fear God more than some who even profess to love him. But I will not particularize farther on such a subject. Be they what they may, our situations are so distant, and we are likely to meet so seldom, that were they, as they are not, persons even of exceptionable manners, their manners would have little to do with me. We correspond, at present, only on the subject of what passed at Troy three thousand years ago; and they are matters that, if they can do no good, will at least hurt nobody.

Your friendship for me, and the proof that I see of it in your friendly concern for my welfare on this occasion, demanded that I should be explicit. Assure yourself that I love and honour you, as upon all accounts, so especially for the interest that you take, and have ever taken in my welfare, most sincerely. I wish you all happiness in your new abode, all possible

success in your ministry, and much fruit of your newly-published labours; and am, with Mrs. Unwin's love to yourself and Mrs. Newton,

Most affectionately yours,
My dear friend,
W. C.

From the renewal of their intercourse, Lady Hesketh had manifested the most sincere and affectionate solicitude for her poor kinsman's welfare. Her offers of pecuniary assistance had been accepted as frankly as they were made,—this being one of those cases in which it is equally blessed to give and to receive. She had enquired minutely into the state of his health, and finding that he suffered much from indigestion, insisted upon his sending for a physician from Northampton. She sent him wine, and ordered him a supply of oysters through the season. Mrs. Unwin, so far from feeling that jealousy with which she has been reproached, was prepared to esteem her as more than a friend. "Tell Lady Hesketh that I truly love and honour her," was the message which she charged Cowper to deliver: "Now, my cousin," said he, "you may depend upon it as a most certain truth, that these words from her lips are not an empty sound: I never in my life heard her profess a regard for any one that she felt not. She is not addicted to the use of such language upon ordinary occasions; but when she speaks it, speaks from the heart. She has baited me this many a day, even as a bear is baited, to send for Dr. Kerr. But, as I hinted to you upon a former occasion, I am as mulcish as

most men are, and have hitherto most gallantly refused. But what is to be done now? If it were uncivil not to comply with the solicitations of one lady, to be unmoved by the solicitations of two, would prove me to be a bear indeed. I will therefore summon him to the consideration of said stomach and its ailments, without delay, and you shall know the result[37]."

The physician's opinion was favourable; he saw no reason to doubt a speedy recovery;—indeed his medicines seem to have produced their desired effect, and Cowper reported, in playful sport, his progress toward recovery. Of mental malady there was at that time no manifestation. Lady Hesketh feared to touch upon that string; but he, who understood her feelings, entered upon it himself. "You do not ask me, my dear," said he, "for an explanation of what I could mean by *anguish of mind*.—Because you *do not* ask, and because your reason for not asking consists of a delicacy and tenderness peculiar to yourself; for that very cause I will tell you. A wish suppressed is more irresistible than many wishes plainly uttered. Know then, that in the year 1773, the same scene that was acted at St. Alban's, opened upon me again at Olney, only covered with a still deeper shade of melancholy; and ordained to be of much longer duration. I was suddenly reduced from my wonted rate of understanding, to an almost childish imbecility. I did not, indeed, lose my senses, but I lost the power to exercise them. I could return a rational answer, even to a difficult question; but a question was necessary, or I never spoke at all. This state of mind was accompanied, as

[37] Nov. 30, 1785.

I suppose it to be in most instances of the kind, with misapprehensions of things and persons, that made me a very untractable patient. I believed that every body hated me, and that Mrs. Unwin hated me most of all,—was convinced that all my food was poisoned, together with ten thousand meagrims of the same stamp. I would not be more circumstantial than is necessary. Dr. Cotton was consulted. He replied, that he could do no more for me than might be done at Olney, but recommended particular vigilance, lest I should attempt my life,—a caution for which there was the greatest occasion. At the same time that I was convinced of Mrs. Unwin's aversion to me, I could endure no other companion. The whole management of me consequently devolved upon her, and a terrible task she had. She performed it, however, with a cheerfulness hardly ever equalled on such an occasion; and I have often heard her say, that if ever she praised God in her life, it was when she found that she was to have all the labour. She performed it accordingly, but, as I hinted once before, very much to the hurt of her own constitution. It will be thirteen years, in little more than a week, since this malady seized me. Methinks I hear you ask,—your affection for me will, I know, make you wish to do so,—'Is it removed?' I reply, in great measure, but not quite. Occasionally I am much distressed, but that distress becomes continually less frequent, and, I think, less violent. I find writing, and especially poetry, my best remedy. Perhaps had I understood music, I had never written verse, but had lived upon fiddle-strings instead. It is better however as it is. A poet may, if he pleases, be

of a little use in the world, while a musician, the most skilful, can only divert himself, and a few others. I have been emerging gradually from this pit. As soon as I became capable of action, I commenced carpenter, made cupboards, boxes, and stools. I grew weary of this in about a twelvemonth, and addressed myself to the making of bird-cages. To this employment succeeded that of gardening, which I intermingled with that of drawing; but finding that the latter occupation injured my eyes, I renounced it, and commenced poet. I have given you, my dear, a little history in short-hand. I know it will touch your feelings, but do not let it interest them too much. *In the year when I wrote the Task*, (for it occupied me about a year,) *I was very often most supremely unhappy;* and am, under God, indebted in a good part to that work for not having been much worse[38]."

The different state of mind in which Cowper described his malady at Olney, from that in which he drew up the dreadful narrative of his madness in the Temple and of his recovery at St. Alban's, might induce, if not a belief of his perfect restoration, a reasonable hope of it. In the former instance, he fully believed that the happy change which had taken place in him was supernatural; and of this, both Mr. Newton and Mrs. Unwin were so thoroughly persuaded, that many months elapsed after the second attack, violent as the access was, before they could bring themselves to ask Dr. Cotton's advice. They thought that the disease was the work of the Enemy, and that nothing less than Omnipotence could free him from it. Means they

[38] Jan. 16, 1786.

allowed were in general not only lawful but expedient; but his was a peculiar and exempt case, in which they were convinced that the Lord Jehovah would be alone exalted when the day of deliverance should come[39]. Cowper had now learned to take a saner view of his own condition; and Mrs. Unwin, who was no longer under any external excitement, and whose natural good sense had not yet been impaired, regarded it with the same sobriety, and while she prayed with unabating faith for his perfect restoration, employed all prudential means for averting a relapse. Experience, now that they were in a state to profit by it, had not been lost upon them; and Mr. Unwin, from the time that his correspondence with Cowper commenced, had exercised a constant and beneficial influence, both over his mother and his friend.

As the General was expected to pay a visit at Olney, Lady Hesketh gave her cousin a hint upon the only subject which might possibly occasion any uncomfortable feeling between them. Cowper's reply shows what the change in his own views had been. "As to the affair of religious conversation," he said, "fear me not, lest I should trespass upon his peace in that way. Your views, my dear, upon the subject of a proper conduct in that particular are mine also. When I left St. Alban's, I left it under impressions of the

[39] This is affirmed in a letter of Mrs. Unwin's which was not in my possession till the former volume was published. It is one of the important letters for which the editor, the publishers, and the public are obliged to Mr. Upcott. Had it reached me in time its proper place would have been in the text:—for the present, I insert it among the Supplementary Notes.

existence of a God, and of the truth of scripture, that I had never felt before. I had unspeakable delight in the discovery, and was impatient to communicate a pleasure to others that I found so superior to every thing that bears the name. This eagerness of spirit, natural to persons newly informed, and the less to be wondered at in me, who had just emerged from the horrors of despair, made me imprudent, and, I doubt not, troublesome to many. Forgetting that I had not *those* blessings at my command which it is God's peculiar prerogative to impart,—spiritual light and affections, I required in effect of all with whom I conversed, that they should see with my eyes; and stood amazed that the Gospel, which with me was all in all, should meet with opposition, or should occasion disgust in any. But the Gospel could not be the word of God if it did not; for it foretells its own reception among men, and describes it as exactly such. Good is intended, but harm is done, too often, by the zeal with which I was at that time animated. But, as in affairs of this life, so in religious concerns likewise, experience begets some wisdom in all who are not incapable of being taught. I do not now, neither have I for a long time, made it my practice to force the subject of evangelical truth on any. I received it not from man myself, neither can any man receive it from me. God is light, and from him all light must come; to *his* teaching, therefore, I leave those whom I was once so alert to instruct myself. If a man asks my opinion, or calls for an account of my faith, he shall have it; otherwise I trouble him not. Pulpits for preaching;

and the parlour, the garden, and the walk abroad for friendly and agreeable conversation[40]."

The account which he had given of himself distressed his cousin. "I knew," said he, "that my last letter would give you pain; but there is no need that it should give you so much. He who hath preserved me hitherto will still preserve me. All the dangers that I have escaped are so many pillars of remembrance, to which I shall hereafter look back with comfort, and be able, as I well hope, to inscribe on every one of them a grateful memorial of God's singular protection of me. Mine has been a life of wonders for many years, and a life of wonders I in my heart believe it will be to the end. Wonders I have seen in the great deeps, and wonders I shall see in the paths of mercy also. This, my dear, is my creed[41]." And this no doubt it was during many years, except at intervals, when the cloud came over him; which, however, at such times oppressed his spirits more than it darkened his understanding. His own letters, as they furnish the only materials, contain also the best account that could be given of his state of nerves. Telling Lady Hesketh that Dr. Kerr had recommended air and exercise as the best physic for him, and in all weathers, he says, "come, therefore, my dear, and take a little of this good physic with me, for you will find it beneficial as well as I; come and assist Mrs. Unwin in the re-establishment of your cousin's health. Air and exercise, and she and you together, will make me a perfect Samson. You will have a good house over

[40] April 3, 1786. [41] January 28, 1786.

your head, comfortable apartments, obliging neighbours, good roads, a pleasant country, and in us, your constant companions, two who will love you, and do already love you dearly and with all our hearts. If you are in any danger of trouble, it is from myself if my fits of dejection seize me; and as often as they do you will be grieved for me; but perhaps by your assistance I shall be able to resist them better. If there is a creature under Heaven from whose co-operation with Mrs. Unwin I can reasonably expect such a blessing, that creature is yourself. I was not without such attacks when I lived in London, though at that time they were less oppressive; but in your company I was never unhappy a whole day in all my life[42]."

The General's intended visit was prevented by his ill health; the time fixed for Lady Hesketh's was June. "My dear," said her cousin, "I will not let you come till the end of May or the beginning of June, because, before that time, my green-house will not be ready to receive us, and it is the only pleasant room belonging to us. When the plants go out, we go in. I line it with mats, and spread the floor with mats; and there you shall sit, with a bed of mignionette at your side, and a hedge of honeysuckles, roses, and jasmine; and I will make you a bouquet of myrtle every day. Sooner than the time I mention, the country will not be in complete beauty. And I will tell you what you shall find at your first entrance. Imprimis, as soon as you have entered the vestibule, if you cast a look on either side of you, you shall see on the right hand a

[42] May 8, 1786.

box of my making. It is the box in which have been lodged all my hares, and in which lodges Puss at present; but he, poor fellow, is worn out with age, and promises to die before you can see him. On the right hand, stands a cupboard, the work of the same author; it was once a dove-cage, but I transformed it. Opposite to you stands a table, which I also made; but a merciless servant having scrubbed it until it became paralytic, it serves no purpose now but of ornament; and all my clean shoes stand under it. On the left hand, at the further end of this superb vestibule, you will find the door of the parlour, into which I will conduct you, and where I will introduce you to Mrs. Unwin, unless we should meet her before, and where we will be as happy as the day is long."

Among the circumstances which cheered Cowper at this time, there is one that proves how strong an interest he had excited in an individual. What was the nature of the first communication from this person cannot be collected from any documents that have yet appeared, but it is thus spoken of in a letter[43] to Lady Hesketh. "Hours and hours and hours have I spent in endeavours altogether fruitless, to trace the writer of the letter that I send, by a minute examination of the character; and never did it strike me, till this moment, that your father wrote it. In the style I discover him; in the scoring of the emphatic

[43] The date has been cut off with the signature, for some collector of autographs. But from its place in the collection the letter appears to have been written at the end of December, 1785.

words, (his never-failing practice;) in the formation of many of the letters; and in the Adieu! at the bottom, so plainly, that I could hardly be more convinced had I seen him write it. Tell me, my dearest cousin, if you are not of my mind? How much am I bound to love him if it be so! Always much; but in that case, if possible, more than ever.

"Farewell, thou beloved daughter of my beloved anonymous uncle."

That Lady Hesketh did not confirm this suspicion is certain, and he did not repeat it when he informed her of a second and more important letter from the same unknown[44]. "Anonymous is come again. May God bless him, whosoever he be, as I doubt not that he will! A certain person said on a certain occasion, (and He never spake word that failed.) 'whoso giveth you a cup of cold water in my name, shall by no means lose his reward.' Therefore, anonymous as he chooses to be upon earth, his name, I trust, shall hereafter be found written in heaven. But when great princes, or characters much superior to great princes, choose to be incog. it is a sin against decency and good manners to seem to know them. I therefore know nothing of Anonymous, but that I love him heartily, and with most abundant cause. Had I opportunity, I would send you his letter, though, yourself excepted, I would indulge none with a sight of it. To confide it to *your* hands will be no violation of the secrecy that he has enjoined himself, and consequently me. But I can give you a short summary

[44] January 23, 1786.

of its purport.—After an introduction of a religious cast, which does great honour to himself, and in which he makes an humble comparison between himself and me, by far too much to my advantage, he proceeds to tell me, that being lately in company where my last work was mentioned, mention was also made of my intended publication. He informs me of the different sentiments of the company on that subject, and expresses his own in terms the most encouraging: but adds, that having left the company and shut himself up in his chamber, an apprehension there seized him lest, if perhaps the world should not enter into my views of the matter, and the work should come short of the success that I hope for, the mortification might prove too much for my health; yet thinks that even in that case, I may comfort myself by adverting to similar instances of a failure, where the writer's genius would have insured success, if any thing could have insured it, and alludes in particular to the fate and fortune of the Paradise Lost. In the last place, he gives his attention to my circumstances, takes the kindest notice of their narrowness, and makes me a present of an annuity of fifty pounds a year, wishing that it were five hundred pounds. In a P. S. he tells me that a small parcel will set off by the Wellinborough coach on Tuesday next, which he hopes will arrive safe.—I have given you the bones; but the benignity and affection, which is the marrow of those bones, in so short an abridgement, I could not give you."

"I kept my letter unsealed to the last moment, that I might give you an account of the safe arrival of the

expected parcel. It is at all points worthy of the letter-writer. Snuff-box, purse, notes, Bess, Puss, Tiney—all safe. Again, may God bless him!"

In his next letter[45] he says, "It is very pleasant, my dearest cousin, to receive a present so delicately conveyed as that which I received so lately from Anonymous; but it is also very painful to have nobody to thank for it. I find myself therefore driven by stress of necessity, to the following resolution, viz. that I will constitute you my Thanks-receiver-general, for whatsoever gift I shall receive hereafter, as well as for those that I have already received from a nameless benefactor. I therefore thank you, my cousin, for a most elegant present, including the most elegant compliment that ever poet was honoured with; for a snuff-box of tortoise-shell, with a beautiful landscape on the lid of it, glazed with crystal, having the figures of three hares in the fore-ground, and inscribed above with these words, *The Peasant's Nest*—and below with these—*Tiney, Puss, and Bess.* For all and every of these, I thank you, and also for standing proxy on this occasion. Nor must I forget to thank

[45] This letter Hayley has printed. From his silence respecting the annuity, and also respecting the regular allowance which Cowper received from his relations, I am inclined to think that he never saw those letters to Lady Hesketh with which I have been entrusted. Speaking of his pecuniary circumstances when he settled at Olney, Hayley says, "he was very far from inheriting opulence on the death of his father," (vol. i. p. 93). Mr. Grimshawe, leaving the rest of the paragraph as it stood, has substituted for these words the erroneous assertion, that "the death of his father placed him in a state of independence," (vol. i. p. 94).

you that so soon after I had sent you the first letter of Anonymous, I received another in the same hand. —There! Now I am a little easier."

I have no means of ascertaining who this benefactor was; though undoubtedly Lady Hesketh was, as Cowper supposed, in the secret. It was not Lady Hesketh herself, because, after her offer of assistance had been made and accepted, she would not have affected any mystery in bestowing it. Nor is it likely to have been her father. Handwritings may, like faces, be distinctly remembered for twenty years, but in the course of twenty years both undergo a great though gradual change; and it is more probable that Cowper should be mistaken when he thought he had detected his uncle's hand, than that the latter, choosing to remain unknown, should have given so direct a clue to a discovery. Could it be his daughter Theodora? Were it not that the comparison which the letter-writer drew between Cowper and himself, seems to be one which would have occurred only to a man, I should have no doubt that Theodora was the person; and notwithstanding that obvious objection, am still inclined to think so; for the presents were what a woman would have chosen, and it is certain that her love was as constant as it was hopeless. Hers was a melancholy lot; but she had the consolation of knowing now wherefore, and how wisely her father had acted in forbidding a marriage which must have made her miserable indeed.

However desirous Cowper may have been to know from whom this benefaction came, he thought himself bound to repress all curiosity. Upon the arrival of

another letter, with the announcement of another parcel from the same unknown, he says to his cousin, "who is there in the world that has, or thinks he has, reason to love me to the degree that he does? But it is no matter. He chooses to be unknown, and his choice is, and ever shall be, so sacred to me, that if his name lay on the table before me reversed, I would not turn the paper about that I might read it. Much as it would gratify me to thank him, I would turn my eyes away from the forbidden discovery. I long to assure him, that those same eyes, concerning which he expresses such kind apprehensions lest they should suffer by this laborious undertaking, are as well as I could expect them to be, if I were never to touch either book or pen. Subject to weakness, and occasional slight inflammations, it is probable that they will always be; but I cannot remember the time when they enjoyed any thing so like an exemption from those infirmities as at present. One would almost suppose that reading Homer were the best ophthalmic in the world. I should be happy to remove his solicitude on the subject, but it is a pleasure that he will not let me enjoy. Well then, I will be content without it; and so content, that, though I believe you, my dear, to be in full possession of all this mystery, you shall never know me while you live, either directly, or by hints of any sort, attempt to extort or to steal the secret from you. I should think myself as justly punishable as the Beth-shemites for looking into the ark, which they were not allowed to touch."

The more this is considered the more probable it

appears that the benefaction came from no other hand than Theodora's. The presents were all womanly,—all indicating a woman's kind and thoughtful regard for whatever might contribute to his comfort and convenience. The first had been a desk, which he supposed to be Lady Hesketh's gift; and the arrival of which, after it had been delayed on the road and impatiently expected, and almost despaired of at last, he announced (under that impression) in a postscript thus characteristically[46], "Oh that this letter had wings, that it might fly to tell you that my desk, the most elegant, the completest, the most commodious desk in the world, and of all the desks that are or ever shall be, the desk that I love the most, is safe arrived. Nay, my dear, it was actually at Sherrington when the waggoner's wife (for the man himself was not at home) croaked out her abominable 'No.' Yet she examined the bill of lading, but either did it so carelessly, or, as poor Dick Madan used to say, with such *an ignorant eye*, that my name escaped her. My precious cousin, you have bestowed too much upon me. I have nothing to render to you in return, but the affectionate feelings of a heart most truly sensible of your kindness. How pleasant it is to write upon such a green bank! I am sorry that I have so nearly reached the end of my paper. I have now, however, only room to say, that Mrs. Unwin is delighted with her box, and bids me do more than thank you for it. What can I do more, at this distance, but say that she loves you heartily, and that so do I? The pocket-book is also

[46] Dec. 7, 1785.

the completest that ever I saw, and the watch-chain the most brilliant. Adieu for a little while. Now for Homer. My dear, yours,

W. C.

In his next letter[47], he says, "Dearest cousin, my desk is always pleasant, but never so pleasant as when I am writing to you. If I am not obliged to you for the thing itself, at least I am for your having decided the matter against me, and resolving that it should come in spite of all objections. If I must not know to whom I am primarily indebted for it, at least let me entreat you to make my acknowledgments of gratitude and love."

Some womanly present usually accompanied the half-yearly remittance, and on one of these occasions further cause appeared for suspecting from what quarter they came. "By the post of yesterday," he says to Lady Hesketh[48], "I received a letter from Anonymous, giving me advice of the kind present which I have just particularized, in which letter allusion is made to a certain piece by me composed, entitled, I believe, the Drop of Ink. The only copy I ever gave of that piece, I gave to yourself. It is *possible*, therefore, that between you and Anonymous there may be *some* communication. If that should be the case, I will beg you just to signify to him, as opportunity may occur, the safe arrival of his most acceptable present, and my most grateful sense of it." Who but Theodora could it have been who was thus intimate

[47] Dec. 15, 1785. [48] Dec. 19, 1787.

with Lady Hesketh, and felt this deep and lively and constant regard for Cowper?

Cowper's reflections upon the unexpected accession made by this annuity to his scanty means, express a cheerful trust in Providence, showing that then, at least, his mind was perfectly sane upon that point. "Wonder with me," he says, "my beloved cousin, at the goodness of God, who, according to Dr. Watts's beautiful stanza,

> Can clear the darkest skies,
> Can give us day for night,
> Make drops of sacred sorrow rise
> To rivers of delight.

As I said once before, so say I again, my heart is as light as a bird on the subject of Homer. Neither without prayer, nor without confidence in the providential goodness of God, has that work been undertaken or continued. I am not so dim-sighted, sad as my spirit is at times, but that I can plainly discern his Providence going before me in the way. Unforeseen, unhoped for advantages have sprung at his bidding, and a prospect at first cloudy indeed, and discouraging enough, has been continually brightening ever since I announced my intentions. But suppose the worst. Suppose that I should not succeed in any measure proportioned to my hopes. How then? Why then, my dear, I will hold this language with myself, 'To write was necessary to me. I undertook an honourable task, and with upright intentions. It served me more than two years for an amusement, and as such

was of infinite service to my spirits. But God did not see it good for me that I should be very famous. If he did not, it is better for me that I am not. Fame is neither my meat nor my drink. I lived fifty years without it, and should I live fifty more, and get to heaven at last, then I shall be sure not to want it. So, my dear, you see that I am armed at all points. I do not mean that I should feel nothing, but that, thus thinking, I should feel supportably."

No letters ever bore the stamp of sincerity more distinctly than Cowper's. In thus expressing himself, he wrote as he thought, and would, in the event, have felt as he expected. Yet he had an ardent thirst for fame. "I am not ashamed," he says, "to confess, that having commenced an author, I am most abundantly desirous to succeed as such. *I have (what perhaps you little suspect me of) in my nature an infinite share of ambition.* But with it, I have, at the same time, as you well know, an equal share of diffidence. To this combination of opposite qualities it has been owing, that, till lately, I stole through life without undertaking any thing, yet always wishing to distinguish myself. At last I ventured, ventured too in the only path, that, at so late a period, was yet open to me; and am determined, if God have not determined otherwise, to work my way through the obscurity that has been so long my portion, into notice. Every thing, therefore, that seems to threaten this my favourite purpose with disappointment, affects me nearly. I suppose that all ambitious minds are in the same predicament. He who seeks distinction must be sensible of disapprobation, exactly in the same proportion

as he desires applause. And now, my precious cousin, I have unfolded my heart to you in this particular, without a speck of dissimulation. Some people, and good people too, would blame me. But you will not; and they, I think, would blame without just cause. We certainly do not honour God, when we bury, or when we neglect to improve, as far as we may, whatever talent he may have bestowed on us, whether it be little or much. In natural things, as well as in spiritual, it is a never-failing truth, that to him, who *hath*, (that is to him that occupies what he hath diligently, and so as to increase it.) more shall be given. Set me down, therefore, my dear, for an industrious rhymer, so long as I shall have the ability. For in this only way is it possible for me, so far as I can see, either to honour God, or to serve man, or even to serve myself."

Cowper was happier at this time than he had ever been since the days of his youth. He was engaged in an undertaking not unworthy of his talents, and of the reputation he had acquired; it accorded equally with his inclination, his habits, and his health; and in the intervals of employment he had the expectation of seeing his cousin after the lapse of so many years, and the pleasure of making preparations for her reception. They would fain have had her for their guest, and have fitted up the room which served him for a study, as her chamber; but to this Lady Hesketh objected. It would not have been easy to find accommodation in Olney, if the greater part of the vicarage, which was "much too good for the living," had not been unoccupied and unfurnished. Mr. Scott, who was highly

esteemed among persons of his own persuasion, had left this curacy to officiate at the Lock Hospital; and his successor in the cure being a bachelor, reserving two rooms for himself, was glad to let the rest of the house, which a shopkeeper engaged to furnish for the time of her abode. "The whole affair," said Cowper, "is thus commodiously adjusted; and now I have nothing to do but to wish for June; and June, my cousin, was never so wished for since June was made. I shall have a thousand things to hear, and a thousand to say; and they will all rush into my mind together, but it will be so crowded with things impatient to be said, that for some time I shall say nothing. But no matter, sooner or later they will all come out; and since we shall have you the longer for not having you under our roof, (a circumstance that more than any thing reconciles us to that measure,) they will stand the better chance. After so long a separation, a separation that of late seemed likely to last for life, we shall meet each other as alive from the dead; and for my own part, I can truly say, that I have not a friend in the other world, whose resurrection would give me greater pleasure."

A house at Weston, belonging to the Throckmortons, was at that time vacant, and these kind neighbours expressed an earnest wish that Mrs. Unwin and Cowper would take it for the sake of being near them. "If you, my cousin," said he, "were not so well provided for as you are, and at our very elbow, I verily believe I should have mustered all my rhetoric to recommend it to you. You might have it for ever, without danger of ejectment, whereas your possession

of the vicarage depends on the life of the vicar, who is eighty-six. The environs are most beautiful, and the village itself one of the prettiest I ever saw. Add to this, you would step immediately into Mr. Throckmorton's pleasure-ground, where you would not soil your slippers, even in winter[49]." After looking at the house, he wrote to her, that it was such a one as in most respects would suit her well. "But Moses Brown, our vicar," said he, "who, as I told you, is in his eighty-sixth year, is not bound to die for that reason. He said himself, when he was here last summer, that he should live ten years longer; and for aught that appears so he may; in which case for the sake of its near neighbourhood to us, the vicarage has charms for me that no other place can rival. But this and a thousand things more shall be talked over when you come[50]."—"Come then, my beloved cousin, for I am determined, that 'whatsoever king shall reign, you shall be vicar of Olney.'"

He proposed to meet her at Newport Pagnel, but assented to her opinion that there would be many inconveniences in such an arrangement. "Assure yourself," said he, "my dearest cousin, that both for your sake, since you make a point of it, and for my own, I will be as philosophically careful as possible, that these fine nerves of mine shall not be beyond measure agitated, when you arrive. In truth, there is much greater probability that they will be benefited, and greatly too. Joy of heart, from whatever occasion it may arise, is the best of all nervous medicines; and I should not wonder if such a turn given to my spirits should have

[49] May 3, 1786. [50] May 25.

even a lasting effect of the most advantageous kind upon them. You must not imagine, neither, that I am, on the whole, in any great degree subject to nervous affections. Occasionally I am, and have been these many years, much liable to dejection; but at intervals, and sometimes for an interval of weeks, no creature would suspect it. For I have not that which commonly is a symptom of such a case belonging to me,—I mean extraordinary elevation in the absence of Mr. Bluedevil. When I am in the best health, my tide of animal sprightliness flows with great equality, so that I am never, at any time, exalted in proportion as I am sometimes depressed. My depression has a cause, and if that cause were to cease, I should be as cheerful thenceforth, and perhaps for ever, as any man need be. But, as I have often said, Mrs. Unwin shall be my expositor.

"Adieu, my beloved cousin. God grant that our friendship, which, while we could see each other, never suffered a moment's interruption, and which so long a separation has not in the least abated, may glow in us to our last hour, and be renewed in a better world, there to be perpetuated for ever.

"For you must know, that I should not love you half so well, if I did not believe you would be my friend to eternity. There is not room enough for friendship to unfold itself in full bloom in such a nook of life as this. Therefore I am, and must, and will be,

"Yours, for ever,

"W. C."[51]

[51] May 25.

When this passage was written, it is evident that his mind was free from the dreadful notion which characterised his insanity. And at this time, even in his darker moods, he spoke of his own state hopefully. "I have made your heart ache too often," said he, "my poor dear cousin, with talking about my fits of dejection. Something has happened that has led me to the subject, or I would have mentioned them more sparingly. Do not suppose, or suspect, that I treat you with reserve, there is nothing, in which I am concerned, that you shall not be made acquainted with; but the tale is too long for a letter. I will only add, for your present satisfaction, that the cause is not exterior, that it is not within the reach of human aid, and that yet I have a hope myself, and Mrs. Unwin a strong persuasion, of its removal. I am, indeed, even now, and have been for a considerable time, sensible of a change for the better, and expect, with good reason, a comfortable lift from you. Guess then, my beloved cousin, with what wishes I look forward to the time of your arrival, from whose coming I promise myself, not only pleasure, but peace of mind, at least an additional share of it. At present it is an uncertain and transient guest with me, but the joy with which I shall see and converse with you at Olney, may, perhaps, make it an abiding one[52]."

Lady Hesketh arrived about the middle of June. "I am fond of the sound of bells," says Cowper, "but was never more pleased with those of Olney, than when they rang her into her new habitation. It is a

[52] May 29.

compliment that our performers upon those instruments have never paid to any other personage, (Lord Dartmouth excepted,) since we knew the town. In short, she is, as she ever was, my pride and my joy, and I am delighted at every thing that means to do her honour. Her first appearance was too much for me; my spirits, instead of being greatly raised, as I had inadvertently supposed they would be, broke down with me; under the pressure of too much joy, and left me flat or rather melancholy throughout the day, to a degree that was mortifying to myself, and alarming to her. But I have made amends for this failure since, and in point of cheerfulness have far exceeded her expectations, for she knew that sable had been my suit for many years[53]."

To Hill he said that his dear cousin's arrival had made them happier than they ever were before at Olney, and that her company was a cordial of which he should feel the effect, not only while she remained there, but as long as he lived. He wrote cheerfully also to Mr. Newton. "It was an observation," said he, "of a sensible man whom I knew well in ancient days, (I mean when I was very young,) that people are never in reality happy when they boast much of being so. I feel myself accordingly well content to say, without any enlargement on the subject, that an inquirer after happiness might travel far, and not find a happier trio than meet every day either in our parlour, or in the parlour of the vicarage. I will not say that mine is not occasionally somewhat dashed with the sable hue of those notions concerning myself and my situation that

[53] To Mr. Unwin, July 3.

have occupied, or rather possessed me so long; but on the other hand, I can also affirm that my cousin's affectionate behaviour to us both, the sweetness of her temper, and the sprightliness of her conversation relieve me in no small degree from the presence of them."

There were discomforts attending his situation in Olney which Cowper felt, though he seldom allowed himself to complain of them. Upon telling Mr. Newton one winter, that owing to the state of the weather, he and Mrs. Unwin had not escaped into the fields more than three times since the autumn, he said, "Man, a changeable creature in himself, seems to subsist best in a state of variety, as his proper element: a melancholy man, at least, is apt to grow sadly weary of the same walks and the same pales, and to find that the same scene will suggest the same thoughts perpetually[54]." This is a melancholy passage; but a blacker melancholy possessed him when he described to the same friend his contentment in his situation, and the reason why he was contented. "I am not shut up in the Bastile," said he; "there are no moats about my castle, no locks upon my gates of which I have not the key; but an invisible, uncontrollable agency—a local attachment,—an inclination more forcible than I ever felt even to the place of my birth, serves me for prison-walls, and for bounds which I cannot pass. In former years I have known sorrow, and before I had ever tasted of spiritual trouble. The effect was an abhorrence of the scene in which I had suffered so much, and a weariness of those objects which I had so long looked at with an eye of despondency and dejection.

[54] Feb. 2, 1782.

But it is otherwise with me now. The same cause subsisting, and in a much more powerful degree, fails to produce its natural effect. The very stones in the garden-walls are my intimate acquaintance. I should miss almost the minutest object, and be disagreeably affected by its removal, and am persuaded, that were it possible I could leave this incommodious nook for a twelvemonth, I should return to it again with rapture, and be transported with the sight of objects, which to all the world beside would be at least indifferent; some of them, perhaps, such as the ragged thatch and the tottering walls of the neighbouring cottages, disgusting. But so it is; and it is so, because here is to be my abode, and because such is the appointment of *Him* that placed me in it.

Iste terrarum mihi præter omnes
Angulus ridet.

It is the place of all the world I love the most, not for any happiness it affords me, but because here I can be miserable with most convenience to myself, and with the least disturbance to others."

During winter Cowper was fain, instead of healthier and more natural exercise, to use dumb-bells, and a skipping-rope. His own health nevertheless suffered, want of wholesome exercise having been the cause of his stomach complaints; and Mrs. Unwin, who had no such substitution, suffered more. Even in summer their situation was in this respect unfavourable. Writing to Lady Hesketh a little before her arrival, he says, "Our walks are, as I told you, beautiful, but it is a walk to get at them; and though, when you come, I

shall take you into training, as the jockeys say, and doubt not that I shall make a nimble and good walker of you in a short time, you would find, as even I do in warm weather, that the preparatory steps are rather too many in number. Weston, which is our pleasantest retreat of all, is a mile off; and there is not in that whole mile to be found so much shade as would cover you. Mrs. Unwin and I have for many years walked thither every day in the year when the weather would permit; and to speak like a poet, the limes and the elms of Weston can witness for us both how often we have sighed and said, 'Oh that our gardén door opened into this grove, or into this wilderness! for we are fatigued before we reach them, and when we have reached them, have not time to enjoy them.' Thus stands the case, my dear, and the unavoidable *ergo*[55] stares you in the face:—would I could do so just at this moment! We have three or four other walks, but except one, they all lie at such distance as you would find heinously incommodious; but Weston, as I said before, is our favourite. Of that we are never weary; its superior beauties gained it our preference at the first, and for many years it has prevailed to win us away from all the others. There was indeed, some time since, in a neighbouring parish, called Lavendon, a field, one side of which formed a terrace, and the other was planted with poplars, at whose foot ran the Ouse, that I used to account a little Paradise. But the poplars have been felled; and the scene has suffered so much by the loss, that, though still in point

[55] That she should bring her own horses as well as carriage to Olney.

of prospect beautiful, it has not charms sufficient to attract me now. A certain poet wrote a copy of verses on this melancholy occasion[56]."

This account prepared Lady Hesketh for the resolution which she formed immediately upon seeing that her cousin's habitation was as miserable in itself, as it was inconvenient in its situation. The expense of a removal was more than Cowper and Mrs. Unwin could at that time have incurred, even if they could have roused themselves to the effort. Lady Hesketh gave the impulse, and supplied the means; and before she had been a week at Olney, the house at Weston was taken. "And now," said Cowper, to Mr. Unwin, "I shall communicate intelligence that will give you pleasure. When you first contemplated the front of our abode you were shocked. In your eyes it had the appearance of a prison, and you sighed at the thought that your mother lived in it. Your view of it was not only just but prophetic. It had not only the aspect of a place built for the purposes of incarceration, but has actually served that purpose through a long, long period, and we have been the prisoners. But a gaol-delivery is at hand: the bolts and bars are to be loosed, and we shall escape. A very different mansion, both in point of appearance and accommodation, expects us, and the expense of living in it not greater than we are subjected to in this. It is situated at Weston, one of the prettiest villages in England, and belongs to Mr. Throckmorton. We all three dine with him to-day by invitation, and shall survey it in the afternoon, point out the necessary repairs, and finally adjust the

[56] May, 1, 1786.

treaty. I have my cousin's promise that she will never let another year pass without a visit to us; and the house is large enough to take us and our suite, and her also, with as many of hers as she shall choose to bring. The change will, I hope, prove advantageous both to your mother and me, in all respects. Here we have no neighbourhood; there we shall have most agreeable neighbours in the Throckmortons. Here we have a bad air in winter, impregnated with the fishy-smelling fumes of the marsh miasma; there we shall breathe in an atmosphere untainted. Here we are confined from September to March, and sometimes longer; there we shall be upon the very verge of pleasure-grounds, in which we can always ramble, and shall not wade through almost impassable dirt to get at them. Both your mother's constitution and mine have suffered materially by such close and long confinement, and it is high time, unless we intend to retreat into the grave, that we should seek out a more wholesome residence. A pretty deal of new furniture will be wanted, especially chairs and beds, all which my kind cousin will provide, and fit up a parlour and a chamber for herself into the bargain. So far is well, the rest is left to Heaven[57]."

Lady Hesketh, speaking to her sister Theodora of the intended removal to Weston, in one of the few fragments[58] of her letters which have been preserved, said, "he delights in the place, and likes the inhabitants much; and as they would greatly relieve the cruel solitude he lives in, I wish he could, with ease to himself, see as much of them as possible, for I am

[57] July 3, 1786. [58] Early Productions, &c. p. 62.

sure a little variety of company, and a little cheerful society is necessary to him. Mrs. Unwin seems quite to think so, and expresses the greatest satisfaction that he has within the last year consented to mix a little more with human creatures. As to her, she does seem, in *real truth*, to have no will left on earth but for his good, and literally no will but *his*. How she has supported herself, (as she has done!) the constant attendance, day and night, which she has gone through for the last thirteen years, is to me, I confess, incredible. And in justice to her, I must say, she does it all with an ease that relieves you from any idea of its being a state of sufferance. She speaks of him in the highest terms; and by her astonishing management, he is never mentioned in Olney but with the highest respect and veneration."

"Our friend," says Lady Hesketh, in another fragment[59], "delights in a large table and a large chair. There are two of the latter comforts in my parlour. I am sorry to say, that he and I always spread ourselves out on them, leaving poor Mrs. Unwin to find all the comfort she can in a small one, half as high again as ours, and considerably harder than marble. However, she protests it is what she likes, that she prefers a high chair to a low one, and a hard to a soft one; and I hope she is sincere; indeed, I am persuaded she is. Her constant employment is knitting stockings, which she does with the finest needles I ever saw; and very nice they are,—the stockings I mean. Our cousin has not for many years worn any other than those of her manufacture. She knits silk, cotton, and worsted.

[59] Early Productions, &c. p. 65.

She sits knitting on one side of the table in her spectacles, and he on the other reading to her (when he is not employed in writing) in *his*. In winter, his morning studies are always carried on in a room by himself; but as his evenings are spent in the winter in transcribing, he usually, I find, does them *vis-a-vis* Mrs. Unwin. At this time of the year he writes always in the morning in what he calls his *boudoir;* this is in the garden: it has a door and a window; just holds a small table with a desk and two chairs; but though there are two chairs, and two persons *might* be contained therein, it would be with a degree of difficulty. For this cause, —as I make a point of not disturbing a poet in his retreat, I go not there."

It was said by Dr. Johnson, that "nobody can write the life of a man but those who have eat, and drank, and lived in social intercourse with him." Personal knowledge is, indeed, the greatest of all advantages for such an undertaking, notwithstanding the degree of restraint which must generally be regarded as one of its conditions. But when his letters are accessible, the writer may in great part be made his own biographer,—more fully, and perhaps more faithfully than if he had composed his own memoirs, even with the most sincere intentions. For in letters, feelings and views and motives are related as they existed at the time; whereas in retrospect much must of necessity be overlooked, and much be lost. Some of Cowper's letters at this time are peculiarly interesting both as illustrating his own character and Mr. Newton's. He wrote to that sincere but injudicious friend upon his approaching change of residence.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

MY DEAR FRIEND, Aug. 5, 1786.

You have heard of our intended removal. The house that is to receive us is in a state of preparation, and, when finished, will be both smarter and more commodious than our present abode. But the circumstance that recommends it chiefly is its situation. Long confinement in the winter, and indeed for the most part in the autumn too, has hurt us both. A gravel walk, thirty yards long, affords but indifferent scope to the locomotive faculty: yet it is all that we have had to move in for eight months in the year, during thirteen years that I have been a prisoner. Had I been confined in the Tower, the battlements of it would have furnished me with a larger space. You say well, that there was a time when I was happy at Olney; and I am now as happy at Olney as I expect to be any where without the presence of God. Change of situation is with me no otherwise an object than as both Mrs. Unwin's health and mine may happen to be concerned in it. A fever of the slow and spirit-oppressing kind seems to belong to all, except the natives, who have dwelt in Olney many years; and the natives have putrid fevers. Both they and we, I believe, are immediately indebted for our respective maladies to an atmosphere encumbered with raw vapours issuing from flooded meadows; and we in particular, perhaps, have fared the worse, for sitting so often, and sometimes for months, over a cellar filled with water. These ills we shall escape in the uplands; and as we may reasonably hope, of course, their consequences. But as for hap-

piness, he that has once had communion with his Maker must be more frantic than ever I was yet, if he can dream of finding it at a distance from Him. I no more expect happiness at Weston than here, or than I should expect it, in company with felons and outlaws, in the hold of a ballast-lighter. Animal spirits, however, have their value, and are especially desirable to him who is condemned to carry a burthen, which at any rate will tire him, but which, without their aid, cannot fail to crush him. The dealings of God with me are to myself utterly unintelligible. I have never met, either in books or in conversation, with an experience at all similar to my own. More than a twelvemonth has passed since I began to hope that, having walked the whole breadth of the bottom of this Red Sea, I was beginning to climb the opposite shore; and I prepared to sing the song of Moses. But I have been disappointed: those hopes have been blasted; those comforts have been wrested from me. I could not be so duped even by the arch-enemy himself, as to be made to question the divine nature of them; but I have been made to believe (which, you will say, is being duped still more) that God gave them to me in derision, and took them away in vengeance. Such, however is, and has been my persuasion many a long day; and when I shall think on that subject more comfortably, or, as you will be inclined to tell me, more rationally and scripturally, I know not. In the mean time, I embrace with alacrity every alleviation of my case, and with the more alacrity, because, whatsoever proves a relief of my distress, is a cordial to Mrs. Unwin, whose sympathy with me, through the

whole of it, has been such, that, despair excepted, her burthen has been as heavy as mine. Lady Hesketh, by her affectionate behaviour, the cheerfulness of her conversation, and the constant sweetness of her temper, has cheered us both; and Mrs. Unwin not less than me. By her help we get change of air and of scene, though still resident at Olney; and by her means, have intercourse with some families in this country, with whom, but for her, we could never have been acquainted. Her presence here would, at any time, even in my happiest days, have been a comfort to me; but, in the present day, I am doubly sensible of its value. She leaves nothing unsaid, nothing undone, that she thinks will be conducive to our well-being; and, so far as she is concerned, I have nothing to wish, but that I could believe her sent hither in mercy to myself,—then I should be thankful.

I am, my dear friend, with Mrs. Unwin's love to Mrs. N. and yourself, hers and yours, as ever,

W. C.

Though this letter could not but draw tears from one who knew the writer so intimately, and loved him so well as Mr. Newton must have known and loved him, it might be supposed that the predominant feeling, which it would excite, would be pleasure at the favourable change that had taken place in his poor friend's external circumstances. The disappearance of Cowper's papers renders it impossible to say what, or whether any direct answer was made to it; but about a month after its date, Mr. Newton wrote to Mrs. Unwin in a spirit, which, though the letter itself has been

destroyed, or lost, may be perfectly understood by what Cowper says concerning it to her son[60].

"You have had your troubles, and we ours. This day three weeks, your mother received a letter from Mr. Newton, which she has not yet answered, nor is likely to answer hereafter. It gave us both much concern, but her more than me; I suppose, because my mind being necessarily occupied in my work, I had not so much leisure to browze upon the wormwood that it contained. The purport of it is, a direct accusation of me, and of her an accusation implied, that we have both deviated into forbidden paths, and lead a life unbecoming the Gospel; that many of my friends in London are grieved, and the simple people of Olney astonished; that he never so much doubted of my restoration to Christian privileges as now;—in short, that I converse too much with people of the world, and find too much pleasure in doing so. He concludes with putting your mother in mind, that there is still an intercourse between London and Olney, by which he means to insinuate that we cannot offend against the decorum that we are bound to observe, but the news of it will most certainly be conveyed to him. —We do not at all doubt it. We never knew a lie hatched at Olney that waited long for a bearer; and though we do not wonder to find ourselves made the subjects of false accusation in a place ever fruitful in such productions, we do, and must wonder a little, that he should listen to them with so much credulity. I say this, because if he had heard only the truth, or had believed no more than the truth, he would not, I

[60] Sept. 24, 1786.

think, have found either me censurable, or your mother. And that *she* should be suspected of irregularities is the more wonderful, (for wonderful it would be at any rate,) because she sent him, not long before, a letter conceived in such strains of piety and spirituality, as ought to have convinced him that she, at least, was no wanderer. But what is the fact; and how do we spend our time in reality? What are the deeds for which we have been represented as thus criminal? Our present course of life differs in nothing from that which we have both held these thirteen years, except that, after great civilities shown us, and many advances made on the part of the Throcks, we visit them. That we visit also at Gayhurst. That we have frequently taken airings with my cousin in her carriage, and that I have sometimes taken a walk with her on a Sunday evening, and sometimes by myself; which, however, your mother has never done. These are the only novelties in our practice; and if by these procedures, so inoffensive in themselves, we yet give offence, offence must needs be given. God and our own consciences acquit us, and we acknowledge no other judges.

"The two families with whom we have kicked up this astonishing intercourse are as harmless in their conversation and manners as can be found any where. And as to my poor cousin, the only crime that she is guilty of against the people of Olney is, that she has fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and administered comfort to the sick. Except, indeed, that by her great kindness, she has given us a little lift in point of condition and circumstances, and has thereby excited envy

in some who have not the knack of rejoicing in the prosperity of others. And this I take to be the root of the matter.

"My dear William, I do not know that I should have teased your nerves and spirits with this disagreeable theme, had not Mr. Newton talked of applying to you for particulars: he would have done it, he says, when he saw you last, but had not time. You are now qualified to inform him as minutely as we ourselves could, of all our enormities. Adieu! Our sincerest love to yourself and yours.

"W^M. C."

A spirit so intolerant and inquisitorial might have been deemed harsh and unbecoming even in a father confessor. But it will not appear surprising in Mr. Newton, when it is remembered that, in his own words[61], his "name was up about that country for preaching people mad;" that, according to his own account, there were at one time "near a dozen of his flock," and "most of them truly gracious people, disordered in their minds;" and that he consoled himself with thinking, that "if the Lord brought them through fire and water safe to his kingdom, whatever they might suffer by the way, they were less to be pitied than the mad people of the world, who take occasion to scoff at the Gospel, as if it was only fit to drive people out of their senses." It was not, however, by fiery and sulphureous preaching that Mr. Newton produced these deplorable effects; if he did not perceive the enormous evil of such preaching, he saw and acknowledged its

[61] Vol. i. p. 270.

unfitness. Moreover, he was a man in whom invincible strength of heart was combined with no ordinary degree of tenderness. The mischief which he caused, was effected by a system of excitement, by supererogatory services, by holding meetings which accord as little with the spirit as with the discipline of the Church of England, by making the yoke of his people painful and their burthen heavy, by requiring them to commune with others upon those things on which our Saviour has enjoined us to commune with our own hearts, and by never allowing them to be still.

His zeal and his genius, aided by the remarkable story of his life, had rendered him a conspicuous personage in what is called the religious world. Among those who were beginning to arrogate to themselves the designation of Evangelical clergy, there were none who approached him in abilities except Rowland Hill and the fierce Toplady. But spiritual pride treads close upon the heels of spiritual power; and that besetting sin manifested itself on this occasion towards Cowper and Mrs. Unwin. While he resided at Olney he had acted as their spiritual director, .. for that character is not confined to the Romish priesthood; .. and when, upon his removal to London, they ceased to be under his superintendence, he appears to have considered it as a trespass if they moved out of the narrow circle within which he had circumscribed them; and "as absent in the body, but present in spirit," to have supposed that he, like St. Paul, was authorized to "judge as though he were present." How Cowper resented this unwarrantable interference has been seen in his letter to Mr. Unwin, towards whom he

had no reserve: he must have been void of feeling if he had not felt as he there expressed himself. But when he wrote to Mr. Newton, the sense of former obligations and kindnesses, of true respect, and of as much affection as is compatible with any degree of fear, tempered his resentment. Mr. Newton, methinks, could not have read without emotion, nor without some self-reproach, the calm and melancholy strain of vindication in which he was addressed.

TO THE REV. JOHN NEWTON.

MY DEAR FRIEND, Sept. 30, 1786.

No length of separation will ever make us indifferent either to your pleasures or your pains. We rejoice that you have had so agreeable a jaunt, and (excepting Mrs. Newton's terrible fall, from which, however, we are happy to find that she received so little injury,) a safe return. We, who live always encompassed by rural scenery, can afford to be stationary; though we ourselves, were I not too closely engaged with Homer, should perhaps follow your example, and seek a little refreshment from variety and change of place,—a course that we might find not only agreeable, but, after a sameness of thirteen years, perhaps useful. You must, undoubtedly, have found your excursion beneficial, who at all other times endure, if not so close a confinement as we, yet a more unhealthy one, in city air and in the centre of continual engagements.

Your letter to Mrs. Unwin, concerning our conduct and the offence taken at it in our neighbourhood, gave us both a great deal of concern; and she is still deeply

affected by it. Of this you may assure yourself, that if our friends in London have been grieved, they have been misinformed; which is the more probable, because the bearers of intelligence hence to London are not always very scrupulous concerning the truth of their reports; and that if any of our serious neighbours have been astonished, they have been so without the smallest real occasion. Poor people are never well employed even when they judge one another; but when they undertake to scan the motives and estimate the behaviour of those whom Providence has exalted a little above them, they are utterly out of their province and their depth. They often see us get into Lady Hesketh's carriage, and rather uncharitably suppose that it always carries us into a scene of dissipation, which, in fact it never does. We visit, indeed, at Mr. Throckmorton's, and at Gayhurst; rarely, however, at Gayhurst, on account of the greater distance: more frequently, though not very frequently, at Weston, both because it is nearer, and because our business in the house that is making ready for us often calls us that way. The rest of our journeys are to Beaujeat turnpike and back again; or, perhaps, to the cabinet-maker's at Newport. As Othello says,

> The very head and front of my offending
> Hath this extent, no more.

What good we can get or can do in these visits, is another question,—which they, I am sure, are not at all qualified to solve. Of this we are both sure, that under the guidance of Providence we have formed these connexions; that we should have hurt the Chris-

tian cause, rather than have served it, by a prudish abstinence from them; and that St. Paul himself, conducted to them as we have been, would have found it expedient to have done as we have done. It is always impossible to conjecture, to much purpose, from the beginnings of a providence, in what it will terminate. If we have neither received nor communicated any spiritual good at present, while conversant with our new acquaintance, at least no harm has befallen on either side; and it were too hazardous an assertion even for our censorious neighbours to make, that, because the cause of the Gospel does not appear to have been served at present, therefore it never can be in any future intercourse that we may have with them. In the mean time I speak a strict truth, and as in the sight of God, when I say that we are neither of us at all more addicted to gadding than heretofore. We both naturally love seclusion from company, and never go into it without putting a force upon our disposition; at the same time I will confess, and you will easily conceive, that the melancholy incident to such close confinement as we have so long endured, finds itself a little relieved by such amusements as a society so innocent affords. You may look round the Christian world, and find few, I believe, of our station, who have so little intercourse as we with the world that is not Christian.

We place all the uneasiness that you have felt for us upon this subject, to the account of that cordial friendship of which you have long given us proof. But you may be assured, that notwithstanding all rumours to the contrary, we are exactly what we were

when you saw us last;—I, miserable on account of God's departure from me, which I believe to be final; and she, seeking his return to me in the path of duty, and by continual prayer[62].

Yours, my dear friend,

W. C.

Cowper retained no resentments; nor indeed could any uncomfortable feeling be of long continuance between two persons who entertained so sincere a regard for each other. Their correspondence, therefore, resumed its wonted tone, being interrupted only on Cowper's part by the hurry and confusion consequent upon a removal. Lady Hesketh remained at Olney till the middle of November, and on the day after her departure, her cousin and Mrs. Unwin took possession of their new abode.

[62] I think it fitting here to extract Mr. Grimshawe's remarks upon this transaction.

"That the above letter may be fully understood, it is necessary to state, that Mr. Newton had received an intimation from Olney that the habits of Cowper, since the arrival of Lady Hesketh, had experienced a change; and that an admonitory letter from himself might not be without its use. Under these circumstances, Newton addressed such a letter to his friend as the occasion seemed to require. The answer of Cowper is already before the reader, and in our opinion amounts to a full justification of the poet's conduct. We know from various testimonies of unquestionable authority, that no charge tending to impeach the consistency of Mrs. Unwin, or of Cowper, can justly be alleged. If Newton should be considered as giving too easy a credence to these reports, or too rigid and ascetic in his spirit, we conceive that he could not, consistently with his own views as a faithful minister, and his deep interest in the welfare of Cowper, have acted otherwise, though he may possibly have expressed himself too strongly."—Vol. iii. pp. 220—1.

CHAP. XIV.

COWPER AT WESTON. MR. UNWIN'S DEATH. RETURN OF COWPER'S MALADY. OLD FRIENDSHIPS RENEWED, AND NEW ONES FORMED.

"THERE are some things," said Cowper to Mr. Bagot[1], who was now one of his regular correspondents, "that do not actually shorten the life of man, yet seem to do so, and frequent removals from place to place are of that number. For my own part, at least, I am apt to think, if I had been more stationary, I should seem to myself to have lived longer. My many changes of habitation have divided my time into many short periods, and when I look back upon them they appear only as the stages in a day's journey, the first of which is at no very great distance from the last.

"I lived longer at Olney than any where. There, indeed, I lived, till mouldering walls and a tottering house warned me to depart. I have accordingly taken the hint, and two days since arrived, or rather took up my abode at Weston. You, perhaps, have never made the experiment, but I can assure you, that the confusion which attends a transmigration of this kind is infinite, and has a terrible effect in deranging the intellects. I have been obliged to renounce my Homer on the occasion, and though not for many days, I feel as if study and meditation, so long my confirmed habits, were on a sudden become impracticable, and that I shall certainly find them so when I attempt them again. But in a scene so much quieter and pleasanter

[1] Nov. 17, 1786.

than that which I have just escaped from, in a house so much more commodious, and with furniture about me so much more to my taste, I shall hope to recover my literary tendency again, when once the bustle of the occasion shall have subsided.

"How glad I should be to receive you under a roof, where you would find me so much more comfortably accommodated than at Olney! I know your warmth of heart toward me, and am sure that you would rejoice in my joy. At present, indeed, I have not had time for much self-gratulation, but have every reason to hope, nevertheless, that in due time I shall derive considerable advantage, both in health and spirits, from the alteration made in my *whereabout*."

On the same day he announced his removal to Mr. Newton. "When God speaks to a chaos," said he, "it becomes a scene of order and harmony in a moment; but when his creatures have thrown one house into confusion by leaving it, and another by tumbling themselves and their goods into it, not less than many days' labour and contrivance is necessary to give them their proper places. And it belongs to furniture of all kinds, however convenient it may be in its place, to be a nuisance out of it. We find ourselves here in a comfortable dwelling. Such it is in itself; and my cousin, who has spared no expense in dressing it up for us, has made it a genteel one. Such, at least, it will be when its contents are a little harmonized. She left us on Tuesday, and on Wednesday in the evening Mrs. Unwin and I took possession. I could not help giving a last look to my old prison and its precincts; and though I cannot easily account for it,

having been miserable there so many years, felt something like a heart-ache when I took my last leave of a scene, that certainly in itself had nothing to engage affection. But I recollected that I had once been happy there, and could not, without tears in my eyes, bid adieu to a place in which God had so often found me. The human mind is a great mystery; mine, at least, appeared to me to be such upon this occasion. I found that I not only had a tenderness for that ruinous abode, because it had once known me happy in the presence of God; but that even the distress I had suffered for so long a time, on account of his absence, had endeared it to me as much. I was weary of every object, had long wished for a change, yet could not take leave without a pang at parting. What consequences are to attend our removal, God only knows. I know well that it is not in situation to effect a cure of melancholy like mine. The change, however, has been entirely a providential one; for much as I wished it, I never uttered that wish, except to Mrs. Unwin. When I learned that the house was to be let, and had seen it, I had a strong desire that Lady Hesketh should take it for herself, if she should happen to like the country. That desire, indeed, is not exactly fulfilled; and yet, upon the whole, is exceeded. We are the tenants; but she assures us that we shall often have her for a guest; and here is room enough for us all. You, I hope, my dear friend, and Mrs. Newton, will want no assurances to convince you that you will always be received here with the sincerest welcome. More welcome than you have been, you cannot be; but better accommodated you may and will be."

They had been little more than a fortnight in their new habitation, before they received an account of Mr. Unwin's being dangerously ill, and this was speedily followed by tidings of his death. Mr. Henry Thornton, with whom he was travelling, had been seized with a typhus fever at Winchester, and recovered from it; Unwin took the infection, and to him it proved fatal. He was a man of sincere but sober piety, and of considerable talents, which he had carefully improved. His disposition was cheerful, his affections warm and constant, and his manners singularly amiable; .. one of those rare persons who are liked at first sight, and loved in proportion as they are known. Cowper was not the only distinguished author who consulted him upon his writings; his old tutor, Paley, had the same high opinion of his judgement, and manifested it by the same proof. At Lady Hesketh's recommendation, the guardians of her late husband's heir, being very desirous of finding a tutor who would train him up conscientiously and wisely in the way he should go, had just concluded an arrangement for placing him with Mr. Unwin.

"It is well for his mother," said Cowper, "that she has spent her life in the practice of an habitual acquiescence in the dispensations of Providence; else, I know that this stroke would have been heavier, after all that she has suffered upon another account, than she could have borne[2]." "She suffers this stroke, not with more patience and submission than I expected, for I never knew her hurried by any affliction into the loss of either, but in appearance, at least, and at

[2] To Lady Hesketh, Dec. 4.

present with less injury to her health than I apprehended[3]."

Cowper himself appeared to suffer less than those who knew his love for the deceased might have expected. Alexander Knox has observed, "that the difference between the letters written to Mr. Newton and to Unwin is particularly striking;" that "there is regard and estimation in the one; friendship, genuine, and vivid, in the other[4]." Like the mother, Cowper controlled his feelings; but the sorrow which she sustained with the composure of a mind habitually subdued, he made an effort to throw off. "She," said he, "derives, as she well may, great consolation from the thought, that he lived the life and died the death of a Christian. The consequence is, if possible, more unavoidable than the most mathematical conclusion, that therefore he is happy. So farewell, my friend Unwin! the first man for whom I conceived a friendship after my removal from St. Albans, and for whom I cannot but still continue to feel a friendship, though I shall see thee with these eyes no more!" To Mr. Newton, he said that it was a subject on which he could say much, and with much feeling, but that, habituated as his mind had been these many years to melancholy themes, he was glad to excuse himself the contemplation of them as much as possible; and he could not think of the widow and children whom Mr. Unwin had left without

[3] To Mr. Smith, Dec. 9.

[4] Correspondence with Bishop Jebb, vol. i. p. 274. "I suppose," he adds, "there are not in the world letters equal in merit, as compositions, to those of Cowper to Unwin."

an heart-ache such as he never remembered to have felt before[5].

He applied himself to the revision of his Homer, and in his letters to his cousin resumed that playful manner which rendered them so delightful. But it soon appeared that he had reckoned upon more strength than he possessed. "I have not touched Homer to-day," he says, (the fifth after he had announced his friend's decease to Lady Hesketh). "Yesterday was one of my terrible seasons, and when I arose this morning, I found that I had not sufficiently recovered myself to engage in such an occupation. Having letters to write, I the more willingly gave myself a dispensation.—Good night[6]!" Two days after, he says, "the cloud that I mentioned to you, my cousin, has passed away,—or perhaps the skirts of it may still hang over me. I feel myself, however, tolerably brisk, and tell you so because I know you will be glad to hear it. The grinners at John Gilpin little dream what the author sometimes suffers. How I hated myself yesterday for having ever wrote it! May God bless thee, my dear! Adieu[7]."

But the cloud which he hoped had passed away was again gathering. "Once since we left Olney," says he to Mr. Newton, "I had occasion to call at our old dwelling: and never did I see so forlorn and woeful a spectacle. Deserted of its inhabitants, it seemed as if it could never be dwelt in for ever. The coldness of it, the dreariness, and the dirt, made me think it no unapt resemblance of a soul that God has forsaken. While he dwelt in it, and manifested himself there, he could create his own

[5] Dec. 16. [6] Dec. 9. [7] Dec. 11.

accommodations, and give it occasionally the appearance of a palace; but the moment he withdraws, and takes with him all the furniture and embellishment of his graces, it becomes what it was before he entered it —the habitation of vermin, and the image of desolation. Sometimes I envy the living, but not much, or not long; for while they live, as we call it, they too are liable to desertion. But the dead who have died in the Lord, I envy always; for they, I take it for granted, can be no more forsaken."

He was not, however, yet wholly possessed by such feelings, and seems to have pursued as wise a course of self management as the most judicious friend could have advised. Early in January (the month which he dreaded), he says to Lady Hesketh[8], "I have had a little nervous feeling lately, my dear, that has somewhat abridged my sleep; and though I find myself better to day than I have been since it seized me, yet I feel my head lightish, and not in the best order for writing. You will find me, therefore, not only less alert in my manner than I usually am when my spirits are good, but rather shorter: I will, however, proceed to scribble till I find that it fatigues me; and then will do, as I know you would bid me do were you here,—shut up my desk and take a walk."

At this time Mr. Newton expressed his regret, that instead of the version on which he was now engaged, he had not undertaken a work of his own. He replied[9], "I have many kind friends, who, like yourself, wish that, instead of turning my endeavours to a translation of Homer, I had proceeded in the way of original

[8] Jan. 8, 1787. [9] Jan. 13, 1787.

poetry. But I can truly say that it was ordered otherwise, not by me, but by the Providence that governs all my thoughts, and directs my intentions as he pleases. It may seem strange, but it is true, that after having written a volume, in general with great ease to myself, I found it impossible to write another page. The mind of man is not a fountain, but a cistern; and mine, God knows, a broken one. It is my creed, that the intellect depends as much, both for the energy and the multitude of its exertions, upon the operations of *God's* agency upon it, as the heart, for the exercise of its graces, upon the influence of the Holy Spirit. According to this persuasion, I may very reasonably affirm, that it was not God's pleasure that I should proceed in the same track, because he did not enable me to do it. A whole year I waited, and waited in circumstances of mind that made a state of non-employment peculiarly irksome to me. I longed for the pen, as the only remedy, but I could find no subject: extreme distress of spirit at last drove me, as, if I mistake not, I told you some time since, to lay Homer before me, and translate for amusement. Why it pleased God that I should be hunted into such a business, of such enormous length and labour, by miseries for which He did not see good to afford me any other remedy, I know not. But so it was; and jejune as the consolation may be, and unsuited to the exigencies of a mind that once was spiritual, yet a thousand times have I been glad of it; for a thousand times it has served at least to divert my attention, in some degree, from such terrible tempests as I believe have seldom been permitted to beat upon a human

mind. Let my friends, therefore, who wish me some little measure of tranquillity in the performance of the most turbulent voyage that ever Christian mariner made, be contented, that, having Homer's mountains and forests to windward, I escape, under their shelter, from the force of many a gust that would almost overset me: especially when they consider that, not by choice, but by necessity, I make *them* my refuge. As to fame, and honour, and glory, that may be acquired by poetical feats of any sort, God knows, that if I could lay me down in my grave with hope at my side, or sit with hope at my side in a dungeon all the residue of my days, I would cheerfully wave them all. For the little fame that I have already earned has never saved me from one distressing night, or from one despairing day, since I first acquired it. *For* what I am reserved, or *to* what, is a mystery;—I would fain hope, not merely that I may amuse others, or only to be a translator of Homer."

In the same letter, speaking of one of Mr. Newton's former parishioners, he alludes to his own state, and expresses an opinion concerning it, according with that in which his friend and Mrs. Unwin had acted upon the former recurrence of his malady.—"Sally Perry's case," said he, "has given me much concern. I have no doubt that it is distemper. But distresses of mind that are occasioned by distemper, are the most difficult of all to deal with. They refuse all consolation, they will hear no reason. God only, by his own immediate impression, can remove them; as after an experience of thirteen years misery, I can abundantly testify."

The nervous fever, of which he had complained, still affected him when this letter was written; during a whole week his nights were almost sleepless, and after one effort more, he was forced to lay his translation aside. "This," says he, "was a sensible mortification to me as you may suppose, and felt the more because, my spirits of course failing with my strength, I seemed to have peculiar need of my old amusement. It seemed hard therefore to be forced to resign it just when I wanted it most. But Homer's battles cannot be fought by a man who does not sleep well, and who has not some little degree of animation in the day time. Last night, however, quite contrary to my expectations, the fever left me entirely, and I slept quietly, soundly, and long. If it please God, that it return not, I shall soon find myself in a condition to proceed. I walk constantly, that is to say Mrs. Unwin and I together; for at these times I keep her continually employed, and never suffer her to be absent from me many minutes. She gives me all her time and all her attention, and forgets that there is another object in the world[10]."

Before, however, this letter was concluded, he found it proper to state that the fever, though it sometimes seemed to leave him, was not yet gone, that it was altogether of the nervous kind, and attended now and then with much dejection. "A young gentleman," he proceeds to say, "called here yesterday, who came six miles out of his way to see me. He was on a journey from London to Glasgow, having just left the univer-

[10] To Lady Hesketh, 1787.

sity there. He came, I suppose, partly to satisfy his own curiosity, but chiefly, as it seemed, to bring me the thanks of the Scotch professors, for my two volumes. His name is Rose, an Englishman. Your spirits being good, you will derive more pleasure from this incident than I can at present, therefore I send it."

These were the last lines which Cowper wrote before his malady returned upon him with full force. There is no other account of it than the little which is said in his own letters after his recovery. "My indisposition could not be of a worse kind. The sight of any face, except Mrs. Unwin's, was to me an insupportable grievance; and when it has happened that by forcing himself into my hiding-place, some friend has found me out, he has had no great cause to exult in his success.—From this dreadful condition of mind, I emerged suddenly; so suddenly, that Mrs. Unwin, having no notice of such a change herself, could give none to any body; and when it obtained, how long it might last, or how far it might be depended on, was a matter of the greatest uncertainty[11]." The disease appears to have continued about six months before it left him, as thus stated. Mrs. Newton would have come to Mrs. Unwin's assistance during her long and painful attendance upon the maniac; but his impatience of any other person's presence rendered this impossible, and for the same reason, Mr. Newton deferred an intended visit to Olney. "You judged rightly," says Cowper. "when you supposed that even your company would have been no relief to me; the company

[11] To Mr. Newton, Oct. 20, 1787.

of my father or my brother, could they have returned from the dead to visit me, would have been none to me."

The last visitor whom he had seen before his seizure, happened to be the first also after his recovery. Samuel Rose, .. one of those persons whose memory will always be preserved with Cowper's, .. was the son of Dr. William Rose, who kept a school at Chiswick, published an edition of Sallust, and was largely concerned in the Monthly Review[12]. He found Cowper, on his second visit, in a state to derive pleasure from society; and the first letter which Cowper wrote[13], was to thank him for this visit, and for sending him Burns's poems. Nothing, he said, but the constraint of obligation could have induced him to write; but though, in his present state of mind, he could taste nothing, he read nevertheless partly from habit, and partly because it was the only thing of which he was capable; and therefore he had read these poems, and had read them twice. He expressed his admiration of them, but remarked, that it would be a pity if the author should not hereafter divest himself of barbarism, and content himself with writing pure English, in which he appeared perfectly qualified to excel; and he subscribed himself, "your obliged and affectionate humble servant."

[12] Nichols's Literary Anecdotes, vol. iii. p. 387.—"A gentleman," Mr. Nichols says, "well known in the republic of letters, and highly esteemed for his public spirit, his friendly disposition, his amiable and cheerful temper, and his universal benevolence."

[13] July 24, 1787.

Rose was only twenty years of age, and there must have been something remarkable in the conversation and manners of so young a man to have produced so favourable an impression on so slight an acquaintance. Such impressions are not often fallacious, especially in persons of mature years; and in this instance they were fully confirmed and justified. After six weeks, Cowper, who had not taken up the pen again during that interval, wrote to him a second time. "The little taste," said he, "that I have had of your company, and your kindness in finding me out, make me wish that we were nearer neighbours, and that there were not so great a disparity in our years;—that is to say, not that you were older, but that I were younger. Could we have met in early life I flatter myself that we might have been more intimate than now we are likely to be. But you shall not find me slow to cultivate such a measure of your regard as your friends of your own age can spare me. When your route shall lie through this country, I shall hope that the same kindness which has prompted you twice to call on me will prompt you again, and I shall be happy if on a future occasion I may be able to give you a more cheerful reception than can be expected from an invalid. My health and spirits are considerably improved, and I once more associate with my neighbours. My head, however, has been the worst part of me, and still continues so; is subject to giddiness and pain, maladies very unfavourable to poetical employment: but a preparation of the bark, which I take regularly, has so far been of service to me in those respects as to encourage in me a hope that by perseverance in the

use of it I may possibly find myself qualified to resume the translation of Homer.

"When I cannot walk, I read, and read perhaps more than is good for me. But I cannot be idle[14]."

And now he resumed the correspondence with Lady Hesketh, which for seven months had been left to Mrs. Unwin. "Though it costs me something to write," said he, "it would cost me more to be silent. My intercourse with my neighbours being renewed, I can no longer seem to forget how many reasons there are, why you especially should not be neglected,—no neighbour, indeed, but the kindest of my friends, and ere long, I hope, an inmate.

"My health and spirits seem to be mending daily. To what end I know not, neither will conjecture, but endeavour, as far as I can, to be content that they do so. I use exercise, and take the air in the park and wilderness. I read much, but as yet write not. Our friends at the Hall make themselves more and more amiable in our account, by treating us rather as old friends than as friends newly acquired. There are few days in which we do not meet, and I am now almost as much at home in their house as in our own. Mr. Throckmorton, having long since put me in possession of all his grounds, has now given me possession of his library. An acquisition of great value to me, who never have been able to live without books since I first knew my letters, and who have no books of my own.—They often inquire after you, and ask me whether you visit Weston this summer. I answer, yes, and I charge you, my dearest cousin, to authenticate

[14] Aug. 27, 1787.

my information. Write to me, and tell us when we may expect to see you.—I write but little, because writing is become new to me; but I shall come on by degrees [15]."

Lady Hesketh's answer was not delayed, but it gave a melancholy reason wherefore her visit must be postponed. "Come," he replied, "when thou canst come, secure of being always welcome! All that is here is thine, together with the hearts of those who dwell here. I am only sorry that your journey hither is necessarily postponed beyond the time when I did hope to have seen you; sorry too that my uncle's infirmities are the occasion of it. But years *will* have their course, and their effect; they are happiest, so far as this life is concerned, who like him escape those effects the longest, and who do not grow old before their time. Trouble and anguish do that for some, which only longevity does for others. A few months since I was older than your father is now, and though I have lately recovered, as Falstaff says, *some smatch of my youth*, I have but little confidence, in truth none, in so flattering a change, but expect, *when I least expect it*, to wither again. The past is a pledge for the future [16]."

The next was in a more cheerful strain, but it gave some account of the frightful sensations which he had experienced, and of the treatment which had been pursued. "I continue," he said, "to write, though in compassion of my pate, you advised me for the present to abstain. In reality I have no need, at least I believe not, of any such caution. Those jarrings that

[15] Aug. 30. [16] Sept. 4.

made my skull feel like a broken egg-shell, and those twirls that I spoke of, have been removed by an infusion of the bark, which I have of late constantly applied to. I was blooded, indeed, but to no purpose; for the whole complaint was owing to relaxation. But the apothecary recommended phlebotomy, in order to ascertain that matter; wisely suggesting that if I found no relief from bleeding, it would be a sufficient proof that weakness must necessarily be the cause. It is well when the head is chargeable with no weakness but what may be cured by an astringent[17]."—His letters now became playful again, and preserved that tone even when he spoke of his own diseased sensations. "I have a perpetual din," he says, "in my head, and though I am not deaf, hear nothing aright, neither my own voice, nor that of others. I am under a tub, from which tub accept my best love. Yours,

"W. C.[18]"

He had not yet, since his recovery, written to Mr. Newton, though more than two months had elapsed since he became capable of writing to his friends. The letter with which he renewed the correspondence commenced by confessing an extraordinary delusion of mind; concerning which, however, it may be doubted whether it had really obtained from the time of his former recovery, or had arisen during the last occurrence of his disease, and was like one of those dreams which perplex us with the semblance of some imperfectly remembered reality. "My dear friend," he begins, "after a long but necessary inter-

[17] Sept. 8. [18] Sept. 29.

ruption of our correspondence, I return to it again, in one respect, at least, better qualified for it than before; I mean by a belief of your identity, which for thirteen years I did not believe. The acquisition of this light, if light it may be called, which leaves me as much in the dark as ever on the most interesting subjects, releases me however from the disagreeable suspicion that I am addressing myself to you as the friend whom I loved and valued so highly in my better days, while in fact you are not that friend, but a stranger. I can now write to you without seeming to act a part, and without having any need to charge myself with dissimulation;—a charge from which, in that state of mind and under such an uncomfortable persuasion, I knew not how to exculpate myself, and which, as you will easily conceive, not seldom made my correspondence with you a burthen. Still, indeed, it wants, and is likely to want, that best ingredient which can alone make it truly pleasant either to myself or you—that spirituality which once enlivened all our intercourse. You will tell me, no doubt, that the knowledge I have gained is an earnest of more and more valuable information, and that the dispersion of the clouds in part, promises, in due time, their complete dispersion. I should be happy to believe it; but the power to do so is at present far from me. Never was the mind of man benighted to the degree that mine has been. The storms that have assailed me would have overset the faith of every man that ever had any; and the very remembrance of them, even after they have been long passed by, makes hope impossible."

Thanking him then for Mrs. Newton's proffered

assistance on his own part and Mrs. Unwin's, "whose poor bark," said he, "is still held together, though shattered by being tossed and agitated so long at the side of mine," he excused himself for not writing more at length, on the ground that it did not suit him to write much at a time; saying, "this last tempest has left my nerves in a worse condition than it found them; my head especially, though better informed, is more infirm than ever[19]."

He had now the hope of soon seeing Lady Hesketh, to whom he says, "You have made us both happy by giving us a nearer prospect of your arrival. But Mrs. Unwin says, you must not fix an early day for your departure, nor talk of staying only two or three weeks, because it will be a thorn that she shall lean upon all the time you are here; and so say I. It is a comfort to be informed when a visitor will go, whom we wish to be rid of, but the reverse of a comfort, my cousin, when you are in question[20]." As the visit must have been for so short a time, its farther deferment caused the less disappointment; and Cowper could not but acquiesce in the reasons which detained Lady Hesketh in town. "I read with much pleasure, my dear cousin," said he, "the account that you give of my uncle, his snug and calm way of living, the neatness of his little person, and the cheerfulness of his spirit. How happy is he at so advanced an age to have those with him, whose chief delight is to entertain him, and to be susceptible as he is, of being amused! Longevity, that in general, either deprives a man of his friends, or of the power of enjoying their

[19] Oct. 2. [20] Sept. 8.

conversation, deals with *him* more gently, and still indulges him in the possession of those privileges which alone make life desirable. May he long continue to possess them! I acquiesce entirely in the justness of your reasoning on this subject, and must needs confess that were I your father, I should with great reluctance resign you to the demands of any cousin in the world. I shall be happy to see you, my dear, yet once again, but not till I can enjoy that happiness without the violation of any proprieties on your part, not till he can spare you. Give my love to him, and tell him that I am not so much younger than he is *now*, as I was when I saw him last. As years proceed, the difference between the elder and the younger is gradually reduced to nothing. But you will come, and in the meantime the rich and the poor rejoice in the expectation of you; to whom may be added a third sort, ourselves for instance, who are of neither of these descriptions[21]."

The middle of November was fixed for her coming. "Now, that there is something like a time appointed," he says, "I feel myself a little more at my ease. Days and weeks slide imperceptibly away; November is at hand, and the half of it, as you observe, will soon be over. Then, no impediment intervening, we shall meet once more,—a happiness of which I so lately despaired. My uncle, who so kindly spared you before, will, I doubt not, spare you again. He knows that a little frisk in country air will be serviceable to you; and even to my welfare, which is not a little concerned in the matter, I am persuaded he is not indifferent. For this, and

[21] Sept. 20, 1787.

for many other reasons, I ardently wish that he may enjoy, and long enjoy, the measure of health with which he is favoured[22]."

The promise was then for a month, which he said would be short indeed unless she could contrive to lengthen it. But the middle of November came, and with it another postponement. He replied: "My dearest cousin, we are therefore not to meet before Christmas; there is a combination of King, Lords, and Commons, against it, and we must submit. I do it with an ill grace, but in a corner, and nobody, not even yourself, shall know with how much reluctance. In consideration of the necessity there is, that should you come on this side Christmas, you must return immediately after the holidays, on account of those three limbs of the legislature coming together again, I am so far well content that your journey hither should be postponed till your continuance here shall be less liable to interruption; and I console myself, in the mean time, with frequent recollections of that passage in your letter, in which you speak of frequent visits to Weston. This is a comfort on which I have only one drawback; and it is the reflection that I make without being able to help it, on the state and nature of my constant experience, which has taught me that what I hope for with most pleasure, is the very thing in which I am most likely to meet with a disappointment. But sufficient to the past is the evil thereof; let futurity speak for itself[23]!"

Meantime he began to feel the pleasures, and some of the inconveniences, of being an eminent author.

[22] Oct. 27. [23] Nov. 17.

Odes were composed to his honour and glory, the report of which reached him, though he was not always "gratified with their sight." "But I have at least," says he[24], "been tickled with some douceurs of a very flattering nature by the post. A lady unknown addresses the 'best of men;' an unknown gentleman has read my 'inimitable poems,' and invites me to his seat in Hampshire; another incognito gives me hopes of a memorial in his garden; and a Welsh attorney sends me his verses to revise, and obligingly asks

> Say shall my little bark attendant sail,
> Pursue the triumph, and partake the gale!

If you find me a little vain, hereafter, my friend, you must excuse it, in consideration of these powerful incentives, especially the latter; for surely the poet who can charm an attorney, especially a Welsh one, must be at least an Orpheus, if not something greater." With or without cause, and with or without consideration, strangers bestowed upon him some of that leisure of which they presumed he had as much to dispose of as themselves, till (in his own words,) he began "to perceive, that if a man will be an author, he must live neither to himself nor to his friends, so much as to others, whom he never saw nor shall see."

But the most amusing proof both of his celebrity and his good nature, is thus related to Lady Hesketh, "On Monday morning last, Sam brought me word that there was a man in the kitchen who desired to speak with me. I ordered him in. A plain, decent,

[24] To Mr. Bagot, Jan. 3, 1787.

elderly figure made its appearance, and being desired to sit, spoke as follows: 'Sir, I am clerk of the parish of All Saints in Northampton; brother of Mr. Cox the upholsterer. It is customary for the person in my office to annex to a bill of mortality, which he publishes at Christmas, a copy of verses. You will do me a great favour, sir, if you would furnish me with one.' To this I replied, 'Mr. Cox, you have several men of genius in your town, why have you not applied to some of them? There is a namesake of yours in particular, Cox, the statuary, who, every body knows, is a first-rate maker of verses. He surely is the man of all the world for your purpose.'—'Alas! sir, I have heretofore borrowed help from him, but he is a gentleman of so much reading that the people of our town cannot understand him.' I confess to you, my dear, I felt all the force of the compliment implied in this speech, and was almost ready to answer, perhaps, my good friend, they may find me unintelligible too for the same reason. But on asking him whether he had walked over to Weston on purpose to implore the assistance of my muse, and on his replying in the affirmative, I felt my mortified vanity a little consoled, and pitying the poor man's distress, which appeared to be considerable, promised to supply him. The waggon has accordingly gone this day to Northampton loaded in part with my effusions in the mortuary style. A fig for poets who write epitaphs upon individuals! I have written *one* that serves *two hundred* persons."

Seven successive years did Cowper, in his excellent good nature, supply the clerk of All Saints in Northampton, with his Mortuary verses.

But the most pleasing consequence of his celebrity was, that it occasioned the renewal of old friendships. "When I lived in the Temple," he says to his cousin[25], "I was rather intimate with a son of the late Admiral Rowley, and a younger brother of the present admiral. Since I wrote to you last, I received a letter from him in a very friendly and affectionate style. It accompanied half a dozen books which I had lent him five and twenty years ago, and which he apologized for having kept so long, telling me that they had been sent to him at Dublin by mistake, for at Dublin it seems he now resides. Reading my poems, he felt, he said, his friendship for me revived, and wrote accordingly." That Mr. Rowley had always entertained a just opinion of Cowper's talents, and cherished an affectionate remembrance of him, appears by his having preserved the two earliest[26] of his letters which as yet have been discovered. And Cowper, who knew Rowley to be "one of the most benevolent and friendly creatures in the world," replied[27] to his unexpected reintroduction as cordially as he could have desired.

MY DEAR ROWLEY, Weston Underwood, Feb. 21, 1788.

I have not, since I saw you, seen the face of any man whom I knew while you and I were neighbours in the Temple. From the Temple I went to St. Albans, thence to Cambridge, thence to Huntingdon, thence to Olney, thence hither. At Huntingdon I formed a connexion with a most valuable family of the

[25] Dec. 19, 1787. [26] Vol. i. p. 35. 41.

[27] Some of the letters to Mr. Rowley are wanting in the collection with which I have been entrusted, and among them is the first after the renewal of their correspondence.

name of Unwin, from which family I have never since been divided. The father of it is dead; his only son is dead; the daughter is married and gone northward; Mrs. Unwin and I live together. We dwell in a neat and comfortable abode in one of the prettiest villages in the kingdom, where, if your Hibernian engagements would permit, I should be happy to receive you. We have one family here, and only one, with which we much associate. They are Throckmortons, descendants of Sir Nicholas of that name, young persons, but sensible, accomplished, and friendly in the highest degree. What sort of scenery lies around us I have already told you in verse; there is no need, therefore, to do it in prose. I will only add to its printed eulogium, that it affords opportunity of walking at all seasons, abounding with beautiful grass-grounds, which encompass our village on all sides to a considerable distance. These grounds are skirted by woods of great extent, belonging principally to our neighbours above mentioned. I, who love walking, and who always hated riding[28], who am fond of some society, but never had spirits that would endure a great deal, could not, as you perceive, be better situated. Within a few miles of us, both to the east and west, there are other families with whom we mix occasionally; but keeping no carriage of any sort, I cannot reach them often. Lady Hesketh (widow of Sir Thomas, whose name, at least, you remember,) spends part of the year with us, during which time I have means of conveyance, which else are not at my command.

So much for my situation. Now, what am I doing?

[28] See vol. i. p. 36.

Translating Homer. Is not this, you will say, *actum agere?* But if you think again, you will find that it is not. At least, for my own part, I can assure you that I have never seen him translated yet, except in the Dog-Latin, which you remember to have applied to for illumination when you were a school boy. We are strange creatures, my little friend; every thing that we do is in reality important, though half that we do seems to be push-pin. Not much less than thirty years since, Alston and I read Homer through together. We compared Pope with his original all the way. The result was a discovery, that there is hardly the thing in the world of which Pope was so entirely destitute, as a taste for Homer. After the publication of my last volume, I found myself without employment. Employment is essential to me; I have neither health nor spirits without it. After some time, the recollection of what had passed between Alston and myself in the course of this business struck me forcibly; I remembered how we had been disgusted; how often we had sought the simplicity and majesty of Homer in his English representative, and had found instead of them, puerile conceits, extravagant metaphors, and the tinsel of modern embellishment in every possible position. Neither did I forget how often we were on the point of burning Pope, as we burnt Bertram Montfitchet[29] in your chambers. I laid a Homer before me. I translated a few lines into

[29] Some liquid has fallen upon the letter, and completely obliterated all but the initial and last syllable of this word. But the Monthly Review, for April, 1761, notices "The Life and Opinions of Bertram Montfitchet, Esq. written by himself," as an humble imitation of Tristram Shandy.

blank verse; the day following a few more; and proceeding thus till I had finished the first book, was convinced that I could render an acceptable service to the literary world, should I be favoured with health to enable me to translate the whole. The Iliad I translated without interruption. That done, I published Proposals for a subscription, and can boast of a very good one. Soon after, I was taken ill, and was hindered near a twelvemonth. But I have now resumed the work, and have proceeded in it as far as to the end of the fifteenth Iliad, altering and amending my first copy with all the diligence I am master of. For this I will be answerable, that it shall be found a close translation: in that respect, as faithful as our language, not always a match for the Greek, will give me leave to make it. For its other qualifications, I must refer myself to the judgement of the public, when it shall appear. Thus I have fulfilled my promise, and have told you not only how I am at present occupied, but how I am likely to be for some time to come. The Odyssey I have not yet touched. I need not, I am confident, use any extraordinary arts of persuasion to secure to myself your influence, as far as it extends. If you mention that there is such a work on the anvil in this country, in yours perhaps you will meet somebody now and then not disinclined to favour it. I would order you a parcel of printed proposals, if I knew how to send it. But they are not indispensably necessary. The terms are, two large volumes, quarto, royal paper, three guineas; common, two.

I rejoice that you have a post, which, though less lucrative than the labours of it deserve, is yet highly

honourable, and so far worthy of you. Adieu, my dear Rowley. May peace and prosperity be your portion.

Yours, very affectionately,

WM. COWPER.

Mr. Rowley, as might be expected, after this renewal of intercourse, took no little interest in procuring subscribers for his friend; and he met with good success. "I am very sensible of your kindness," says Cowper, "and considering our long separation, am sensible of it the more. Thou art the only one of all my Temple connexions who have, or seem to have, adverted to me since I left them, seven and twenty years ago. From many others I have received numerous acts of kindness, but none from them."

At this time also it was that Mrs. King, whose name frequently appears among Cowper's correspondents, introduced herself to him by letter, as having been intimately acquainted with his brother. This lady was wife of the Rev. John King[30], rector of Pertenhall[30], in Bedfordshire, who was at Westmin-

[30] Not *Dr.* King, nor *Perton-Hall*, as erroneously printed by Dr. J. Johnson and Mr. Grimshawe.

It has been asserted, that "the perusal of Cowper's poems had been the means of conveying impressions of piety to this lady's mind, and it was to record her gratitude and to cultivate his acquaintance that she wrote to him." Certain readers might infer from these words, that Mrs. King was *converted* by Cowper's poems. But if any such insinuation be intended, it is merely gratuitous. Mrs. King was a pious and excellent woman, and had then been five and thirty years the happy wife of a clergyman.

More will be said of this lady in the notes to Cowper's

ster with Cowper, but had had little acquaintance with him there, being three years his senior. He replied to it[31] mournfully, but with cordial kindness, expressed a desire to become better acquainted with one who had been his brother's friend, and subscribed himself, "early as it might seem to say it," hers affectionately. Mentioning this communication to Mr. Newton, he said, "she is evidently a Christian, and a very gracious one. . . I would she had you for a correspondent rather than me. One letter from you would do her more good than a ream of mine."

Cowper seems to have taken little pleasure in conversing with Mr. Newton's immediate successor in the curacy of Olney; it was therefore no loss to him when Mr. Scott was removed to the chaplaincy of the Lock Hospital, which in those days was a post of honour for preachers of his description. The curate who succeeded him is only mentioned as having let part of the vicarage to Lady Hesketh on her first visit to these parts. Moses Browne was then, at eighty-four, so confident in the unimpaired vigour of his hale old age, that he promised himself, as has before been said, a lease of ten years longer; before two had elapsed, his life-tenure was at an end, and the living was given to Mr. Bean, who, with more ability than Mr. Scott, and more discretion than Mr. Newton, was not inferior in piety to

Correspondence; the Rev. Dr. Gorham, of Maidenhead, to whom the letters addressed to her at this time appertain, having obligingly enabled me to print them from the originals, correctly and without mutilation, and favoured me with two which have not before been published.

[31] Feb. 12, 1783.

either. Cowper said of him, as soon as they had exchanged visits on his arrival, "he is a plain, sensible man, and pleases me much;—a treasure for Olney, if Olney can understand his value[32]." Three months later he writes to Mr. Newton, "small as the distance from Olney is, it has too often the effect of a separation between the Beans and us. He is a man with whom, when I can converse at all, I can converse on terms perfectly agreeable to myself; who does not distress me with forms, nor yet disgust me by the neglect of them; whose manners are easy and natural, and his observations always sensible. I often, therefore, wish them nearer neighbours."

But Cowper had now no lack of society, and he was fully employed. In the preceding October, Johnson, who had probably been advised that it was expedient so to do, called his attention once more to the business of translation; a task to which he applied himself forthwith, and with such resolution, that he said to his young friend Mr. Rose[33], "the necessity of applying myself with all diligence to a long work that has been but too long interrupted, will make my opportunities of writing rare in future. Ten months have passed since I discontinued my poetical efforts. I do not expect to find the same readiness as before, till exercise of the neglected faculty, such as it is, shall have restored it to me." Hill and Lady Hesketh were both apprehensive that he might resume his work too soon, and pursue it too closely. To the former he said in reply[34], "I thank you for the solici-

[32] To Lady Hesketh, March 12, 1788.
[33] Oct. 19, 1787. [34] Nov. 16.

tude that you express on the subject of my present studies. The work is undoubtedly long and laborious, but it has an end; and proceeding leisurely, with a due attention to the use of air and exercise, it is possible that I may live to finish it. Assure yourself of one thing, that though to a by-stander it may seem an occupation surpassing the powers of a constitution never very athletic, and at present not a little the worse for wear, I can invent for myself no employment that does not exhaust my spirits more. I will not pretend to account for this; I will only say that it is not the language of predilection for a favourite amusement, but that the fact is really so. I have even found that those plaything-avocations, which one may execute almost without any attention, fatigue me, and wear away, while such as engage me much, and attach me closely, are rather serviceable to me than otherwise."

To Lady Hesketh, he says[35], "You need not, my dear, be under any apprehensions lest I should too soon engage in the translation of Homer. My health and strength of spirits for this service are, I believe, exactly *in statu quo prius*. But Mrs. Unwin having enlarged upon this head, I will therefore say the less. Whether I shall live to finish it, or whether, if I should, I shall live to enjoy any fruit of my labours, are articles in my account of such extreme uncertainty, that I feel them often operate as no small discouragement. But uncertain as these things are, I yet consider the employment as *essential* to my *present* well-

[35] Oct. 27.

being, and pursue it accordingly. But had Pope been subject to the same alarming speculations,—had he, waking and sleeping, dreamt as I do,—I am inclined to think he would not have been my predecessor in these labours. For I compliment myself with a persuasion, that I have more heroic valour, of the passive kind, at least, than he had; perhaps than any man: it would be strange had I not, after so much exercise."

Cowper did not know that Pope also was troubled with dreams while employed upon these labours; that the translation, which in his own case was the anodyne remedy, was in his predecessor's the cause of them; and that Homer, as if in vengeance for being so metamorphosed in his version, visited him like a night mare. Pope's own account of these visitations had not then been published. "What terrible moments," said he, "does one feel after one has engaged for a large work! In the beginning of my translating the Iliad, I wished any body would hang me a hundred times. The Iliad took me up six years, and during that time, and particularly the first part of it, I was often under great pain and apprehension. Though I conquered the thoughts of it in the day, they would frighten me in the night. I dreamed often of being engaged on a long journey, and that I should never get to the end of it. This made so strong an impression upon me, that I sometimes dream of it still;—of being engaged in the translation, of having got above half way through it, and being embarrassed, and under dread of never completing it[36]."

[36] Spence's Anecdotes, pp. 28. 53.

Pope acquired his love of Homer, in early boyhood, from Ogilby's translation[37]; in gratitude for which he ought not to have spoken contemptuously of him in the Dunciad, even if Ogilby had not deserved rather to be held up as an example of laudable perseverance and moral worth. It was the story which charmed him in this version; of the character of the original he could have perceived as little .. as is to be perceived in his own. But Cowper, when he learnt "the tale of Troy divine," and followed Ulysses in his wanderings, was at the same time familiarized with the spirit of the Homeric poems; and in his deep perception of their character and beauty, his undertaking originated. Pope has said that his impelling motive to a work not much suited to his inclination, "was purely the want of money[38] at a time when he had none, not even to buy books." This was said in conversation; and there is nothing derogatory in the plain truth thus bluntly told. His object was to render himself independent by employing his great talents in the way which was likely to procure for him the largest reward. With Cowper it was a labour of love; "this notable job," said he, "is the delight of my heart, and how sorry

[37] Sir William Forbes notices the remarkable fact, that Ogilby's Homer should have been "the first book by which Pope was initiated in poetry, and Ogilby's Virgil, the first book in English verse that Beattie met with. Beattie was made very happy, when in the latter part of his life, a friend who knew this, presented him with a copy of the book."—*Life of Beattie*, vol. i. p. 4.

[38] Spence's Anecdotes, p. 64.

shall I be when it is ended[39]." The hope of profit was an after thought with him.

Pope's usual method was to take advantage of the first heat, and then to correct each book first by the original, next by other translations, and lastly to give it a reading for the versification only[40]." Cowper appears never to have seen any preceding version, except Pope's, to which he never looked for assistance of any kind. Both proceeded at nearly the same rate, and corrected with equal diligence[41]. But Cowper never lost sight of the original in his corrections, and Pope utterly disregarded it; the one endeavoured to represent it as faithfully as he could, the other ambitiously laboured to embellish and improve it.

It is remarkable that Cowper, who took as much pleasure in correcting his verses as in composing them, (when his own taste and judgement were to be consulted, not those of others,) should have very much disliked transcribing them, though transcription frequently leads to corrections, which if not so suggested, might probably never have been made. But having that dislike, it was singularly fortunate for him that his kind neighbours entered with the most friendly warmth into his pursuits, and performed this office for him.

[39] To Lady Hesketh, Dec. 10, 1787.

[40] Spence's Anecdotes, p. 41.

[41] Pope says, "when I fell into the method of translating thirty or forty verses before I got up, and piddled with it the rest of the morning, it went on easily enough; and when I was thoroughly got into the way of it, I did the rest with pleasure." —*Spence*, p. 29.

Mrs. Throckmorton solicited it when Lady Hesketh was gone, and she was his "lady of the ink-bottle for the rest of the winter." Mr. George Throckmorton, when he was visiting his brother, was then the most active amanuensis; and when the family were absent the chaplain offered his service. Such assistance was needed, both as it saved his time, and spared his sight; for though he had once said, "one might almost suppose that reading Homer were the best ophthalmic in the world," the inflammation of the eyes, to which he had always been occasionally subject, compelled him sometimes to refrain from using them. But when this disease was removed, he was so busy a man, "that could I write," said he, "with both hands, and with both at the same time, verse with one, and prose with the other, I should not even so be able to despatch both my poetry and my arrears of correspondence faster than I have need. The only opportunities that I can find for conversing with distant friends, are in the early hour (and that sometimes reduced to half a one) before breakfast[42]."

In the winter of 1787 Mrs. Unwin providentially escaped death, and such a death as must have given Cowper a shock which would probably have completely overthrown his intellect. "This morning," he writes to Lady Hesketh, "had very near been a tragical one to me, beyond all that have ever risen upon me. Mrs. Unwin rose as usual at seven o'clock. At eight she came to me and showed me her bed-gown, with a great piece burnt out of it. Having lighted her fire, which she always lights herself, she placed the

[42] To Mr. Newton, June 5, 1788.

candle upon the hearth. In a few moments it occurred to her, that if it continued there it might possibly set fire to her clothes, therefore she put it out. But in fact, though she had not the least suspicion of it, her clothes were on fire at that very time. She found herself uncommonly annoyed by smoke, such as brought the water into her eyes. Supposing that some of the billets might be too forward, she disposed them differently; but finding the smoke increase, and grow more troublesome, (for by this time the room was filled with it,) she cast her eye downward, and perceived not only her bed-gown, but her petticoat on fire. She had the presence of mind to gather them in her hand, and plunge them immediately into the basin, by which means the general conflagration of her person, which must probably have ensued in a few moments, was effectually prevented. Thus was that which I have often heard from the pulpit, and have often had occasion myself to observe, most clearly illustrated; that secure as we may sometimes seem to ourselves, we are in reality never so safe as to have no need of a superintending Providence. Danger can never be at a distance from creatures who dwell in houses of clay. Therefore take 'care of thyself, gentle Yahoo! and may a more vigilant than thou care for thee[43]!'"

Farther particulars of this providential escape were mentioned in his relation of it to Mr. Newton, .. that Mrs. Unwin was kneeling, and had addressed herself to her devotions, when the thought struck her that the candle being short there might be some danger. The hole burnt in her clothes was as large as the sheet of

[43] Dec. 24, 1787.

paper on which he was writing. "It is not," said he, "possible, perhaps, that so tragical a death should overtake a person actually engaged in prayer; for her escape seems almost a miracle. Her presence of mind by which she was enabled, without calling for help, or waiting for it, to gather up her clothes, and plunge them, burning as they were, in water, seems as wonderful a part of the occurrence as any. The very report of fire, though distant, has rendered hundreds torpid and incapable of self-succour; how much more was such a disability to be expected, when the fire had not seized a neighbour's house, nor begun its devastations in our own, but was actually consuming the apparel that she wore, and seemed in possession of her person. Thus," he said, "Providence had interposed to preserve him from the heaviest affliction that he could now suffer." And asking, in a subsequent letter, what would become of him in case he were to lose her, he added, "I have one comfort, and only one: bereft of that, I should have nothing left to lean on; for my spiritual props have long since been struck from under me[44]."

This was said in one of those darker moods which seem to have come over him when he wrote to Mr. Newton, and to have made the act of writing to him an irksome duty, which he was always willing to put off. In one of his letters he says, "Mrs. Newton and you are both kind and just in believing that I do not love you less when I am long silent. Perhaps a friend of mine, who wishes me to have him always in my thoughts, is never so effectually possessed of the

[44] To Mr. Newton, Oct. 15, 1791.

accomplishment of that wish, as when I have been long his debtor; for *then* I think of him not only every day, but day and night, and all day long. But I confess at the same time, that my thoughts of you will be more pleasant to myself when I shall have exonerated my conscience by giving you the letter so long your due. Therefore, here it comes;—little worth your having; but payment, such as it is, that you have a right to expect, and that is essential to my own tranquillity."

That Cowper and Mr. Newton had a true regard for each other is certain, .. a regard heightened on the one side by a feeling of gratitude, and on the other by that of commiseration. While their intercourse was colloquial there was a warmth of affection in this regard, for Mr. Newton was a man of lively and vigorous intellect, with whom Cowper could converse upon those equal terms by which conversation is rendered easy and delightful. But the next door neighbour and familiar friend was not like the same person as the spiritual director who from a distance watched jealously over the conduct of his friend, and administered exhortation or reproof as he thought meet. It has been seen that his interference was sometimes both unwarrantable and unwise. But if his letters in their general complexion were like those which he addressed to other persons, and which are printed among his works, they were not such as Cowper could have had any pleasure in receiving, .. not such as he requested his friend Unwin to write, .. for Mr. Newton sermonized in his epistles. There is nothing epistolary about them except the beginning and the end.

On Cowper's part, therefore, the correspondence ceased to be pleasurable when time lessened the old feeling of familiarity; and at length so often as he performed it as a duty the cloud came over him. A Romanist who has any great sin to confess, or rummages his conscience for small ones to make up a passable account, enters the confessional with the satisfaction of knowing that at greater or less price of penance he shall obtain a discharge in full. But even to the legitimate influence which Mr. Newton might have exercised, Cowper turned a deaf ear. He had been encouraged to believe that there was nothing illusive in the raptures of his first recovery; and they who had confirmed him in that belief argued in vain against his illusions now when they were of an opposite character: .. such are the perilous consequences of religious enthusiasm. These dark imaginations however were far from having entire possession of him at this time. He was happy in his employment, in his change of abode, in the society of his excellent neighbours at Weston Hall, in the renewed intercourse with his relations, in the growth of his reputation, and the consciousness of the consideration which it had given him in their eyes and with the public, above all in the expectation of Lady Hesketh's annual return. That pleasure was postponed in consequence of her father's gradual decline; a circumstance alluded to in the following poem, which is here printed from the original[45], as sent to Lady Hesketh.

[45] The copy from which it was published after his death had been greatly altered.

BENEFACTIONS.

A POEM IN SHENSTONE'S MANNER.

ADDRESSED TO MY DEAR COZ, APRIL 14, 1788.

This cap that so stately appears
With ribbon-bound tassel on high,
Which seems by the crest that it rears
Ambitious of brushing the sky;
This cap to my Harriet I owe:
She gave it, and gave me beside
A ribbon, worn out long ago,
With which in its youth it was tied.

This chair that I press at my ease,
With tresses of steeds that were black
Well cover'd, and wadded to please
The sitter, both bottom and back;
Thick-studded with bordering nails,
Smooth-headed and gilded and bright,
As Vesper, who when the day fails,
Adorns the dark forehead of Night:

These carpets, so soft to the foot,
Caledonia's traffic and pride,
(Oh spare them, ye Knights of the Boot,
Dirt-splash'd in a cross-country ride!)
This table and mirror within,
Secure from collision and dust,
At which I oft shave cheek and chin,
And periwig nicely adjust:

This moveable structure of shelves,
Contrived both for splendour and use,
And charged with octavoes and twelves,
The gayest I had to produce;
Where flaming in scarlet and gold
My poems enchanted I view,
And hope in due time to behold
My Iliad and Odyssey too:

This china that decks the alcove,
Which mortals have named a beaufette,
But what the Gods call it above
Has ne'er been revealed to us yet:
These curtains that keep the room warm
Or cool, as the season demands;
Those stoves which for figure and form
Seem the labour of Mulciber's hands:

That range, from which many a mess
Comes smoking the stomach to cheer;
That tub,—(you might bathe in a less,)
Where malt is transform'd into beer:
These painted and unpainted chairs,
Those cushion'd, these curiously framed;
Yon bedding and bed above stairs,
With other things not to be named:

These items endear my abode,
Disposing me oft to reflect
By whom they were kindly bestowed,
Whom here I impatient expect.
But, hush! She a parent attends,
Whose dial-hand points to eleven,
Who, oldest and dearest of friends,
Waits only a passage to Heaven.

Then willingly want her awhile,
And, sweeping the chords of your lyre,
The gloom of her absence beguile
As now, with poetical fire.
'Tis yours, for true glory athirst,
In high-flying ditty to rise
On feathers renown'd from the first
For bearing a goose to the skies.

Mr. Rose meantime had visited him again, and was "assured of an undissembling welcome at all times," both on his own part and Mrs. Unwin's; "as to her,"

said Cowper, "she is one of the sincerest of the human race; and if she receives you with the appearance of pleasure, it is because she feels it. Her behaviour on such occasions is with her an affair of conscience, and she dares no more look a falsehood than utter one[46]." Her daughter, Mrs. Powley, and her husband came also to Weston; "her," he says, "we found much improved in her health and spirits; and him, as always, affectionate and obliging. It was an agreeable visit; and as it was ordered for me, I happened to have better spirits than I have enjoyed at any time since[47]."

On the eve of their departure he wrote to Lady Hesketh, and complaining playfully that Mrs. Frog prolonged her stay in London, "it is true," he said, "that northerly winds have blown ever since she left us, but they have not prevented the most exuberant show of blossoms that ever was seen, nor the singing of nightingales on every hedge. Ah, my cousin, thou hast lost all these luxuries too; but not by choice; thine is an absence of necessity. The wilderness is now in all its beauty. I would that thou wert here to enjoy it[48]!"

Ashley Cowper died in the ensuing month, at the age of eighty-six. It is worthy of remark that Cowper's letters upon the occasion could not have been written under the influence of an uncharitable creed, nor of that insane persuasion which characterised his disease.

[46] March 29, 1788. [47] To Mr. Newton, June 5.
[48] May 19.

TO LADY HESKETH.

MY DEAREST COUSIN, The Lodge, June 10, 1788.

Your kind letter of precaution to Mr. Gregson sent him hither as soon as chapel-service was ended in the evening. But he found me already apprized of the event that occasioned it, by a line from Sephus, received a few hours before. My dear uncle's death awakened in me many reflections, which for a time sunk my spirits. A man like him would have been mourned, had he doubled the age he reached. At any age his death would have been felt as a loss, that no survivor could repair. And though it was not probable, that for my own part I should ever see him more, yet the consciousness, that he still lived, was a comfort to me. Let it comfort us now, that we have lost him only at a time, when nature could afford him to us no longer; that as his life was blameless, so was his death without anguish; and that he is gone to heaven. I know not, that human life, in its most prosperous state, can present any thing to our wishes half so desirable as such a close of it.

Not to mingle this subject with others, that would ill suit with it, I will add no more at present, than a warm hope that you and your sister will be able effectually to avail yourselves of all the consolatory matter with which it abounds. You gave yourselves, while he lived, to a father, whose life was, doubtless, prolonged by your attentions, and whose tenderness of disposition made him always deeply sensible of your kindness in this respect, as well as in many others. His old age was the happiest that I have ever known,

and I give you both joy of having had so fair an opportunity, and of having so well used it, to approve yourselves equal to the calls of such a duty in the sight of God and man.

W. C.

TO LADY HESKETH.

The Lodge, June 15, 1788.

Although I know that you must be very much occupied on the present most affecting occasion, yet, not hearing from you, I began to be uneasy on your account, and to fear that your health might have suffered by the fatigue, both of body and spirits, that you must have undergone, till a letter that reached me yesterday from the General set my heart at rest, so far as that cause of anxiety was in question. He speaks of my uncle in the tenderest terms, such as show how truly sensible he was of the amiableness and excellence of his character, and how deeply he regrets his loss. We have indeed lost one who has not left his like in the present generation of our family, and whose equal, in all respects, no future of it will probably produce. My memory retains so perfect an impression of him, that, had I been painter instead of poet, I could from those faithful traces have perpetuated his face and form with the most minute exactness; and this I the rather wonder at because some with whom I was equally conversant five-and-twenty years ago, have almost faded out of all recollection with me. But he made an impression not soon to be effaced, and was in figure, in temper, and manner, and in numerous other respects, such as I shall never be-

hold again. I often think what a joyful interview there has been between him and some of his contemporaries, who went before him. The truth of the matter is, my dear, that they are the happy ones, and that we shall never be such ourselves till we have joined the party. Can there be any thing so worthy of our warmest wishes as to enter on an eternal, unchangeable state, in blessed fellowship and communion with those whose society we valued most, and for the best reasons, while they continued with us? A few steps more through a vain, foolish world, and this happiness will be yours. But be not hasty, my dear, to accomplish thy journey! For of all that live thou art one whom I can least spare; for thou also art one who shalt not leave thy equal behind thee.

W. C.

He composed these lines also for a memorial of the good and happy old man:—

Farewell! endued with all that could engage
All hearts to love thee, both in youth and age!
In prime of life, for sprightliness enroll'd
Among the gay, yet virtuous as the old;
In life's last stage (O blessings rarely found!)
Pleasant as youth with all its blossoms crown'd;
Through every period of this changeful state,
Unchanged thyself, wise, good, affectionate!
Marble may flatter; and lest this should seem
O'ercharged with praises on so dear a theme,
Although thy worth be more than half suppress'd,
Love shall be satisfied, and veil the rest.

Cowper had written to Lord Thurlow at the same time as to Colman, upon issuing the Proposals for his

Homer, and he had obtained no answer. But Lady Hesketh, who neglected nothing whereby she could possibly be the means of serving her cousin, wrote to the Chancellor without his knowledge, and by sending him the letter which she received in reply, opened a way for the renewal of their intercourse.

My dearest Coz! said Cowper[49], he who has thee for a friend will never want a warm one. I send thee *verbatim* and *literatim* what I have sent to the Chancellor. His letter is very kind, and has given me much pleasure. Give my love to the generous Sir Archer[50], whom I honour highly for his bounty, and assure yourself that I love thee dearly and in every corner of my heart.

Adieu. Thine,

W. C.

MY LORD,

Your lordship will be very sure that though Lady Hesketh did not choose to apprize me of her intentions to write to you, she has not thought it necessary to observe the same secrecy with respect to your lordship's answer. The sight of your hand-writing (myself the subject) has awakened in me feelings which with *you* I know will be my sufficient apology for following her example. They are such as would make it difficult for me to be silent, were there any propriety in being so. But I see none. Why should I seem indifferent where I ought to be warm, and am so; and

[49] Aug. 26, 1788.

[50] Sir Archer Croft, of Croft Castle, who married a sister of Lady Hesketh's.

what honour would it do me to appear to have forgotten a friend who still affectionately remembers me?

Had my cousin consulted me before she made application to your lordship in my favour, I should probably, at the same time that I had both loved and honoured her for her zeal to serve me, have discouraged that proceeding. Not because I have no need of a friend, or because I have not the highest opinion of your constancy in that connexion, but because I am sensible how difficult it must be even for *you* to assist a man in his fortunes who *can* do nothing but write verses, and who *must* live in the country. But should no other good effect even follow her application than merely what has already followed it, an avowal on your lordship's part that you still remember me with affection, I shall be always glad that she acted as she did: she has procured me a gratification of which I shall always feel the comfort while I have any sensibility left.

I know that your lordship would never have expressed even remotely a wish to serve me, had you not in reality felt one, and will therefore never lay my scantiness of income to your account, but should I live and die circumscribed as I am, and have been ever, in my finances, will impute it always to its proper cause, my own singularity of character, and not in the least to any deficiency of good will in your lordship's dispositions toward me.

I will take this opportunity to thank you for having honoured my Homer with your subscription. In that work I labour daily, and now draw near to a close of the Iliad, after having been, except an intermission of

eight months occasioned by illness, three years employed in it. It seemed to me, after all Pope's doings, that we still wanted an English Homer; and may I but be happy enough to supply the defect, and to merit your lordship's approbation, I shall envy no poet on the earth at present, nor many that have gone before me.

I have the honour to be, my lord, your lordship's most obliged and affectionate,

WM. COWPER.

The Newtons paid him a visit at the latter end of summer. Cowper enjoyed their society; but the letter which he wrote to Mr. Newton, after being apprized of his safe return to town, was in a diseased and ominous strain. "I found," said he, "those comforts in your visit which have formerly sweetened all our interviews, in part restored. I knew you; knew you for the same shepherd who was sent to lead me out of the wilderness into the pasture where the chief Shepherd feeds his flock, and felt my sentiments of affectionate friendship for you the same as ever. But one thing was still wanting, and that thing the crown of all. I shall find it in God's time, if it be not lost for ever. When I say this, I say it trembling; for at what time soever comfort shall come, it will not come without its attendant evil; and whatever good thing may occur in the interval, I have sad forebodings of the event, having learned by experience that I was born to be persecuted with peculiar fury, and assuredly believing, that such as my lot has been, it will be to the end. This belief is connected in my mind with

an observation I have often made, and is perhaps founded, in great part, upon it: that there is a certain *style* of dispensations maintained by Providence in the dealings of God with every man, which, however the incidents of his life may vary, and though he may be thrown into many different situations, is never exchanged for another. The style of dispensation peculiar to myself has hitherto been that of sudden, violent, unlooked-for change. When I have thought myself falling into the abyss, I have been caught up again; when I have thought myself on the threshold of a happy eternity, I have been thrust down to hell. The rough and the smooth of such a lot, taken together, should perhaps have taught me never to despair; but through an unhappy propensity in my nature to forebode the worst, they have, on the contrary, operated as an admonition to me never to hope. A firm persuasion that I can never durably enjoy a comfortable state of mind, but must be depressed in proportion as I have been elevated, withers my joys in the bud, and, in a manner, entombs them before they are born: for I have no expectation but of sad vicissitude, and ever believe that the last shock of all will be fatal."

These were dark forebodings; yet they had not prevented him from enjoying the society of his friend, whose visit, he said to Lady Hesketh, had been very agreeable. Rose, who was always a welcome guest, became now a frequent one, performing his journeys on foot, with a confidence in his own strength, which Cowper warned him against presuming on too much. He was there during part of Mr. Newton's stay, and transcribed a book of the Iliad; and returning in October, rendered farther assistance of the same kind.

This able and amiable young man, then in his twenty-first year, had attached himself with great warmth of affection to Cowper, and became, as he well deserved to be, a favourite with him and with all his friends. Lady Hesketh was at Weston when he arrived, and the account of their way of life which he gave in a letter[51] to his favourite sister, Harriet, will be read with pleasure by all who take an interest in Cowper's history.

Weston Lodge, Oct. 25, 1788.

"I am at length settled in the house of quiet happiness and undisturbed comfort, where I may say I enjoy myself with the most perfect enjoyment, and look forward to the period of my departure with melancholy regret. My arrival here was delayed nearly a week beyond my original plan, which I must lament, because I shall necessarily have less of Mr. Cowper's company. I came here on Thursday; and here I found Lady Hesketh, a very agreeable, good-tempered, sensible woman, polite without ceremony, and sufficiently well-bred to make others happy in her company. I here feel no restraint, and none is wished to be inspired. The 'noiseless tenor' of our lives would much please and gratify you. An account of one day will furnish you with a tolerably accurate idea of the manner in which all our time is passed. We rise at whatever hour we choose; breakfast at half after nine, take about an hour to satisfy the *sentiment*, not the *appetite*,—for we talk—'good Heavens, how we talk!' and enjoy ourselves most wonderfully. Then we separate,

[51] This is one of the communications for which I am obliged to Mr. William Farr Rose, of the Navy Pay Office, the son of Cowper's friend.

and dispose of ourselves as our different inclinations point. Mr. Cowper to Homer. Mr. R. to transcribing what is already translated. Lady Hesketh to work, and to books alternately; and Mrs. Unwin, who in every thing but her face, is like a kind angel sent from heaven to guard the health of our poet, is busy in domestic concerns. At one, our labours finished, the poet and I walk for two hours. I then drink most plentiful draughts of instruction which flow from his lips, instruction so sweet, and goodness so exquisite, that one *loves* it for its flavour. At three we return and dress, and the succeeding hour brings dinner upon the table, and collects again the smiling countenances of the family to partake of the neat and elegant meal. Conversation continues till tea-time, when an entertaining volume engrosses our thoughts till the last meal is announced. Conversation again, and then rest before twelve, to enable us to rise again to the same round of innocent, virtuous pleasure. Can you wonder that I should feel melancholy at the thought of leaving such a family; or rather, will you not be surprised at my resolution to depart from this quiet scene on Thursday next?"

At that time Cowper was as happy as he appeared to be. His health was better than it had been for many years. "Long time," he says, "I had a stomach that would digest nothing, and now nothing disagrees with it; an amendment for which, I am, under God, indebted to the daily use of soluble tartar, which I have never omitted these two years[52]." Telling Rose,

[52] To Mr. Smith, Dec. 20, 1780.

after his departure, that they were all in good health, and cheerful, he added, "this I say, knowing you will be glad to hear it, for you have seen the time when this could not be said of all your friends at Weston[53]." The society of this young friend had been very agreeable to him. "I have taken," said he, "since you went away, many of the walks which we have taken together; and none of them, I believe, without thoughts of you. I have, though not a good memory in general, yet a good local memory, and can recollect by the help of a tree or stile, what you said on that particular spot. For this reason I purpose, when the summer is come, to walk with a book in my pocket; what I read at my fireside I forget, but what I read under a hedge, or at the side of a pond, that pond and that hedge will always bring to my remembrance; and this is a sort of *memoria technica*, which I would recommend to you if I did not know that you have no occasion for it[54]."

The health of one of the party received a shock, when during a frost, Mrs. Unwin slipt on the gravel walk, fell, and was so severely bruised below the hip, that she was for some time completely crippled; indeed she never recovered her former strength. At first, however, there was amendment enough to keep them in constant hope; and Cowper's spirits continued cheerful after Lady Hesketh returned in January to town. His constant employment materially contributed to this; "I am the busiest man," said he to his cousin, "that ever lived sequestered as I do; and am never idle. My days accordingly roll away with a most tremendous rapidity[55]."

[53] Nov. 30. [54] Jan. 19, 1789. [55] Jan. 31.

Happily there was nothing irksome in any of the business to which he was called. His correspondence, .. except only when upon writing to Mr. Newton, and to him alone, the consciousness of his malady arose in his mind, .. was purely pleasurable. He had his own affliction, and that was of the heaviest kind; but from the ordinary cares and sorrows of life no man was ever more completely exempted. All his connexions were prosperous. Mr. Unwin was the only friend whose longer life must have appeared desirable, of whom death bereaved him. From the time when in the prime of manhood he was rendered helpless, he was provided for by others; that Providence which feeds the ravens raised up one person after another to minister unto him. Mrs. Unwin was to him as a mother; Lady Hesketh as a sister; and when he lost in Unwin one who had been to him as a brother, young men, as has already been seen in the instance of Rose, supplied that loss with almost filial affection. Sad as his story is, it is not altogether mournful: he had never to complain of injustice, nor of injuries, nor even of neglect. Man had no part in bringing on his calamity; and to that very calamity which made him "leave the herd" like "a stricken deer," it was owing that the genius which has consecrated his name, which has made him the most popular poet of his age, and secures that popularity from fading away, was developed in retirement; it would have been blighted had he continued in the course for which he was trained up. He would not have found the way to fame, unless he had missed the way to fortune. He might have been happier in his generation; but he could never have been

so useful; with that generation his memory would have passed away, and he would have slept with his fathers, instead of living with those who are the glory of their country and the benefactors of their kind.

The interruptions which took him sometimes from his regular and favourite occupation, were neither unwelcome nor unseasonable, occasional change being as salutary for the mind as for the body. It was suggested to him by his cousin that he might further a good cause by composing a poem upon the slave trade, which, by the unparalleled exertions of Clarkson, and the zeal and eloquence of Wilberforce, had been brought before the public so as to make a deep and permanent impression. But though it was a subject whereon he had more than once ruminated as he lay in bed, watching the break of day; and though it appeared to him so important at that juncture, and so susceptible of poetical management, that he felt inclined to start in that career, he said, could he have allowed himself to desert Homer long enough, yet upon seeing a poem by Hannah More, he dropped the half-formed inclination. Hannah More was a favourite writer with him; "she had more nerve and energy," he said, "both in her thoughts and language than half the he-rhymers in the kingdom." And he was the more willing to forego the subject, considering that he had already borne his testimony in favour of his black brethren, "and had been one of the earliest," he said, "if not the first, of those who had, in that day, expressed their detestation of that diabolical traffic[56]."

[56] Feb. 16, 1788.

He had been asked to write songs upon the subject, as the surest way of reaching the public ear. And though at first he felt not at all allured to the undertaking, as thinking that it offered only images of horror by no means suited to that style of composition, yet after "turning the matter in his mind as many ways as he could," he produced five[57]. "If you hear ballads sung in the streets on the hardships of the negroes in the islands," he says to Rose[58], "they are probably mine. It must be an honour to any man to have given a stroke to that chain, however feeble." There was only one of them with which he was himself satisfied: though "I have heard them," he says, "all well spoken of. But there are very few things of my own composition that I can endure to read when they have been written a month, though at first they seem to me to be all perfection[59]." There was

[57] "*Three*," he says to General Cowper, "and that which appears to myself the best of those three I have sent you. Of the other two, one is serious, in a strain of thought perhaps rather too serious, and I could not help it. The other, of which the slave-trader is himself the subject, is somewhat ludicrous."

The Morning Dream is what he sent to the General; and he afterwards wrote two others, which are likewise printed among his poems. The one of which he said that perhaps it was rather too serious, has not (I believe) appeared. The other that he mentioned will be found in the Supplementary Notes to the present volume. I am obliged for it to Mr. Joseph Fletcher, jun. who has in his possession the original in Cowper's writing, given by him to his friend Mr. Bull, and by Mr. Bull as a relic to Mr. Fletcher's father.

[58] March 29, 1788.

[59] To Lady Hesketh, June 27, 1788.

another cause for his disliking these ballads; "Slavery," said he[60], "and especially negro slavery, because the cruelest, is an odious and disgusting subject. Twice or thrice I have been assailed with entreaties to write a poem on that theme. But beside that it would be in some sort treason against Homer to abandon him for any other matter, I felt myself so much hurt in my spirits the moment I entered on the contemplation of it, that I have at last determined absolutely to have nothing more to do with it. There are some scenes of horror on which my imagination can dwell, not without some complacence: but then they are such scenes as God, not man, produces. In earthquakes, high winds, tempestuous seas, there is the grand as well as the terrible. But when man is active to disturb, there is such meanness in the design, and such cruelty in the execution, that I both hate and despise the whole operation, and feel it a degradation of poetry to employ her in the description of it. I hope also, that the generality of my countrymen have more generosity in their nature than to want the fiddle of verse to go before them in the performance of an act to which they are invited by the loudest calls of humanity."

Some years back, between the publication of his first and second volumes, he had been asked to contribute to a journal, the title of which does not appear. The application seems to have been made through Mr. Newton, to whom he replied, "From the little I have seen, and the much I have heard, of the manager of the Review you mention, I cannot feel even the

[60] To Mr. Bagot, June 17.

smallest push of a desire to serve him in the capacity of a poet. Indeed, I dislike him so much, that, had I a drawer-full of pieces fit for his purpose, I hardly think I should contribute to his collection. It is possible, too, that I may live to be once more a publisher myself, in which case I should be glad to find myself in possession of any such original pieces as might decently make their appearance in a volume of my own. At present, however, I have nothing that would be of use to him."

There was another journal at that time, called the Theological Miscellany, with which he was better pleased, and in which Mr. Newton was concerned. For this he was disposed to translate a book of Caraccioli's upon Self Acquaintance, .. a chapter for each monthly number. If Mr. Newton thought such a contribution would be welcome, "a labour of that sort," he said, "would suit him better, in his then state of mind, than original composition on religious subjects." Upon farther consideration however though he retained his liking for the book, he perceived that it was not sufficiently consonant with the principles upon which the journal was established and conducted. From that time he seems never to have thought of contributing to any periodical work, except occasionally to the Gentleman's Magazine, till Johnson requested his assistance in the Analytical Review, then recently established. The original scheme of that review, as projected by Mr. Thomas Christie, (a person equally remarkable for his attainments and his abilities,) was, that the contributors should affix their names to their respective articles; but upon farther

consideration, this part of the plan was abandoned, as being liable to objections not less weighty than those that may obviously be made against the ordinary practice.

The first number appeared in May, 1788, and in the February following Cowper was employed in reviewing Glover's Athenaid. That poet would have thought himself fortunate if he had known to whom this favourite work of his old age had been committed. For though Cowper calls himself a supercilious reader, he was in truth as candid as he was competent. Speaking of Mrs. Piozzi's Travels, he says in one of his letters, "it is the fashion, I understand, to condemn them. But we, who make books ourselves, are more merciful to bookmakers. I would that every fastidious judge of authors were himself obliged to write! there goes more to the composition of a volume than many critics imagine. I have often wondered that the same poet who wrote the Dunciad should have written these lines,

> That mercy I to others show,
> That mercy show to me.

Alas for Pope, if the mercy he showed to others was the measure of the mercy he received! he was the less pardonable too, because experienced in all the difficulties of composition."

"The Athenaid," says Cowper, to his cousin[61], "sleeps while I write this. I have made tables of contents for twelve books of it, and have yet eight to analyse. I must then give somewhat like a critical account of the whole, as critical, at least as the brevity

[61] Feb. 4, 1789.

it will be necessary to observe will allow. A poem consisting of twenty books, could not, perhaps, hope for many readers who would go fairly through it; and this has possibly missed a part of the praise it might have received, had the story been comprised within more reasonable limits. I am the more persuaded that this is the case, having found in it many passages to admire. It is condemned, I dare say, by those who have never read the half of it. At the same time I do not mean to say that it is on the whole a first rate poem; but certainly it does not deserve to be cast away as lumber, the treatment which I am told it has generally met with."

Cowper would not have deemed this poem unreasonably long unless he had felt it to be tedious; and perhaps it would not have seemed tedious to him if he had not undertaken to analyse it and deliver a critical opinion upon its merits. A novel, in three such volumes as the Athenaid, is not complained of for its length; and they who cared nothing for its poetical merits or demerits, of which they knew nothing, might have been agreeably entertained by the story, and have found in it that amusement which is all that the generality of readers seek. But Glover had brooded over his hidden treasure too long. More than fifty years elapsed from the publication of Leonidas before this continuation, or second part, appeared as a posthumous work three years after the author's decease. Had it been published while the reputation of the former poem was fresh, it might have pursued the triumph and partaken the gale, for its merits are not inferior, and it has more variety of characters and of incident.

But the success of Leonidas, like that of Cato, had been factitious, and though it had hitherto supported itself, it could not buoy up the Athenaid. Glover had been an influential man in the city at a time when parties in the state ran high, and were nearly equally poised; he was possessed of more than ordinary talents and learning, as well as great mercantile knowledge, and just weight of character; and the party with which he acted rewarded his services against Sir Robert Walpole's administration, by extolling a respectable poem far above its deserts. Those passions had long since passed away; the latter part of his public life had been highly creditable to him in every point of view; but it was not of a kind to captivate popular applause, nor was there any knot of statesmen who had an interest in keeping up his celebrity: .. when that has fallen asleep, the temporary interest that may be excited by an author's death, is not sufficient to revive it. His poems nevertheless well deserve to be included in the next great collection of the English poets, and it is to be regretted that the whole of his works have not been collected.

"This reviewing business," said Cowper, "I find too much an interruption of my main concern, and when I return the books to Johnson, shall desire him to send me either authors less impatient, or no more[62]

[62] There is no other mention of his engagement with the Analytical Review in the letters which have come to my hands. But in July, 1791, he speaks of "loose cash in the hands of his bookseller,"—"a purse at Johnson's to which if need should arise he could recur at pleasure."—As the bargain for his Homer had not then been concluded, and he had given away the copyright of his two volumes, this I think must allude to the proceeds of his reviewing.

till I have finished Homer[63]." Occasional verses, on public events, or incidents arising in his own little circle, took up some portion of his time. These he was fond of writing, .. seeing and partaking in the pleasure they gave to the persons to whom they were addressed, and to those acquainted with the circumstances that gave rise to them. Lady Hesketh, proud of his fame, and eager for any thing which she thought likely to extend it, advised him to think of another volume. He replied, " I have considered, and had indeed before I received your last, considered of the practicability of a new publication ; and the result of my thoughts on that topic is, that with my present small stock of small pieces the matter is not feasible. I have but few, and the greater part of those few have already appeared in the magazine ; a circumstance which of itself would render a collection of them, at this time, improper. It is, however, an increasing fund ; and a month perhaps seldom passes in which I do not add something to it. In time their number will make them more important, and in time possibly I may produce something *in itself* of more importance ; then all may be packed off to the press together ; and in the interim, whatsoever I may write shall be kept secret among ourselves, that being new to the public, it may appear, *when* it appears, with more advantage[64]."

In another letter to the same dear kinswoman he says, " Running over what I have written, I feel that I should blush to send it to any but thyself. Another

[63] To Lady Hesketh, Feb. 15, 1789.

[64] April 14, 1789.

would charge me with being impelled by a vanity from which my conscience sets me clear, to speak so much of myself and my verses as I do. But I thus speak to none but thee, nor to thee do I thus speak from any such motive. I egotize in my letters to thee, not because I am of much importance to myself, but because to thee both Ego, and all that Ego does is interesting. God doth know that when I labour most to excel as a poet, I do it under such mortifying impressions of the vanity of all human fame and glory, however acquired, that I wonder I can write at all[65]."

His greatest pleasure was in the society of those whom he loved. When Rose's visit in the summer of this year was postponed from June till August, he said to him, "a month was formerly a trifle in my account; but at my present age, I give it all its importance, and grudge that so many months should yet pass in which I have not even a glimpse of those I love, and of whom, the course of nature considered, I must ere long take leave for ever.—But I shall live till August[66]." When Lady Hesketh arrived, he said, "This is the third meeting that my cousin and we have had in this country; and a great instance of good fortune I account it in such a world as this, to have expected such a pleasure thrice without being once disappointed[67]." And after both had departed, at the commencement of winter, his observation was, "When a friend leaves us in the beginning of that season, I always feel in my heart a *perhaps*, importing that we

[65] June 6, 1789. [66] June 20.
[67] To Mr. Rose, July 23.

have possibly met for the last time, and that the robins may whistle on the grave of one of us before the return of summer[68]."

But it was his lot, happy indeed in this respect, to form new friendships as he advanced in years, instead of having to mourn for the dissolution of old ones by death. During seven-and-twenty years he had held no intercourse with his maternal relations, and knew not whether they were living or dead; the malady which made him withdraw from the world, seems in its milder consequences to have withheld him from making any inquiry concerning them; and from their knowledge he had entirely disappeared till he became known to the public. One of a younger generation was the first to seek him out. This was Mr. John Johnson, grandson of his mother's brother, Roger Donne, who had been rector of Catfield, in Norfolk. The youth was then a Cambridge student, and made the best use of a Christmas vacation by seeking and introducing himself to his now famous kinsman. Cowper's latent warmth of family feeling was immediately quickened; and he conceived an affection for "the wild, but bashful boy," as he called him, which increased in proportion as he knew him more, and which was amply requited.

Young Johnson had some poetical ambition at that time; he brought with him a manuscript poem of the pastoral kind, entitled the Tale of the Lute, or the Beauties of Audley End, and he produced it as coming from Lord Howard, with his lordship's request that Cowper would revise it. Cowper read it attentively,

[68] Jan. 3, 1790.

was much pleased with some parts, equally disliked others, and told him so "in such terms as one naturally uses when there seems to be no occasion to qualify or to alleviate censure."—It then came out that the youth was himself the writer, .. that Lord Howard not approving it altogether, and some friends of his own age having, on the contrary, commended it highly, he had come to a resolution of abiding by the judgement of the author of the Task, a measure to which Lord Howard had indeed advised him. Upon his expressing afterwards, by letter, some degree of compunction for this artifice, Cowper replied, "Give yourself no trouble on the subject of the politic device you saw good to recur to, when you presented me with your manuscript. It was an innocent deception, at least it could harm nobody save yourself; an effect which it did not fail to produce; and since the punishment followed it so closely, by me at least it may very well be forgiven. You ask how I can tell that you are not addicted to practices of the deceptive kind? And certainly if the little time that I have had to study you were alone to be considered, the question would not be unreasonable; but in general a man who reaches my years finds,

> 'That long experience does attain
> To something like prophetic strain.'

"I am very much of Lavater's opinion, and am persuaded that faces are as legible as books, only with these circumstances to recommend them to our perusal, that they are read in much less time, and are much less likely to deceive us." With regard to the poem itself he gave him this golden advice,—"remember that

in writing, perspicuity is always more than half the battle. The want of it is the ruin of more than half the poetry that is published. A meaning that does not stare you in the face is as bad as no meaning, because nobody will take the pains to poke for it."

This ardent youth took with him, on his departure, several books of Homer to transcribe, volunteering his services in this way; he took also a letter of introduction to Lady Hesketh, who was as much pleased with him as Cowper had been. He had observed with what affection Cowper spoke of his mother; the only portrait of her was in possession of her niece, Mrs. Bodham, who had been a favourite cousin of Cowper's, in her childhood; and upon the youth's report of his visit, on his return home, this picture was sent to Weston, as a present, with a letter from his kinswoman, written in the fulness of her heart. It was replied to with kindred feeling, thus:

TO MRS. BODHAM.

MY DEAREST ROSE, Weston, Feb. 27, 1790.

Whom I thought withered, and fallen from the stalk, but whom I find still alive: nothing could give me greater pleasure than to know it, and to learn it from yourself. I loved you dearly when you were a child, and love you not a jot the less for having ceased to be so. Every creature that bears any affinity to my mother is dear to me, and you, the daughter of her brother, are but one remove distant from her: I love you, therefore, and love you much, both for her sake, and for your own. The world could not have furnished you with a present so acceptable to me, as the picture

which you have so kindly sent me. I received it the night before last, and viewed it with a trepidation of nerves and spirits somewhat akin to what I should have felt, had the dear original presented herself to my embraces. I kissed it, and hung it where it is the last object that I see at night, and, of course, the first on which I open my eyes in the morning. She died when I completed my sixth year; yet I remember her well, and am an ocular witness of the great fidelity of the copy. I remember, too, a multitude of the maternal tendernesses which I received from her, and which have endeared her memory to me beyond expression. There is in me, I believe, more of the Donne than of the Cowper; and though I love all of both names, and have a thousand reasons to love those of my own name, yet I feel the bond of nature draw me vehemently to your side. I was thought in the days of my childhood much to resemble my mother; and in my natural temper, of which at the age of fifty-eight I must be supposed to be a competent judge, can trace both her, and my late uncle, your father. Somewhat of his irritability; and a little, I would hope, both of his and of her——, I know not what to call it, without seeming to praise myself, which is not my intention, but speaking to *you*, I will even speak out, and say *good nature*. Add to all this, I deal much in poetry, as did our venerable ancestor, the Dean of St. Paul's, and I think I shall have proved myself a Donne at all points. The truth is, that whatever I am, I love you all.

I account it a happy event that brought the dear boy, your nephew, to my knowledge; and that break-

ing through all the restraints which his natural bashfulness imposed on him, he determined to find me out. He is amiable to a degree that I have seldom seen, and I often long with impatience to see him again.

My dearest cousin, what shall I say in answer to your affectionate invitation? I *must* say this, I cannot come now, nor soon, and I wish with all my heart I could. But I will tell you what may be done, perhaps, and it will answer to us just as well: you and Mr. Bodham can come to Weston, can you not? The summer is at hand, there are roads and wheels to bring you, and you are neither of you translating Homer. I am crazed that I cannot ask you all together, for want of house-room; but for Mr. Bodham and yourself we have good room, and equally good for any third, in the shape of a Donne, whether named Hewitt, Bodham, Balls, or Johnson, or by whatever name distinguished. Mrs. Hewitt has particular claims upon me; she was my playfellow at Berkhamstead, and has a share in my warmest affections. Pray tell her so! Neither do I at all forget my Cousin Harriet. She and I have been many a time merry at Catfield, and have made the parsonage ring with laughter. Give my love to her. Assure yourself, my dearest cousin, that I shall receive you as if you were my sister, and Mrs. Unwin is, for my sake, prepared to do the same. When she has seen you, she will love you for your own.

I am much obliged to Mr. Bodham for his kindness to my Homer, and with my love to you all, and with Mrs. Unwin's kind respects, am,

My dear, dear Rose, ever yours,

W. C.

P. S.—I mourn the death of your poor brother Castres, whom I should have seen had he lived, and should have seen with the greatest pleasure. He was an amiable boy, and I was very fond of him.

Still another P. S.—I find on consulting Mrs. Unwin, that I have underrated our capabilities, and that we have not only room for you, and Mr. Bodham, but for two of your sex, and even for your nephew into the bargain. We shall be happy to have it all so occupied.

Your nephew tells me, that his sister, in the qualities of the mind, resembles you; that is enough to make her dear to me, and I beg you will assure her that she is so. Let it not be long before I hear from you.

Upon receiving this portrait of his mother, Cowper composed the most beautiful of his minor poems, .. a poem which he tells us he had more pleasure in writing than any that he had ever wrote, one excepted; "that one," he says, "was addressed to a lady who has supplied to me the place of my own mother,—my own invaluable mother,—these six and twenty years. Some sons may be said to have had many fathers; but a plurality of mothers is not common[69]." The following Sonnet must be the piece to which he thus alludes.

Mary! I want a lyre with other strings;
Such aid from Heaven as some have feign'd they drew!
An eloquence scarce given to mortals, new
And undebased by praise of meaner things!

[69] To Mrs. King, March 12, 1790. Certainly Cowper would not thus have spoken of Mrs. Unwin, if there had ever been any matrimonial engagement between them.

That ere through age or woe I shed my wings
I may record thy worth, with honour due,
In verse as musical as thou art true,——
Verse that immortalizes whom it sings!
But thou hast little need; there is a book
By seraphs writ with beams of heavenly light,
On which the eyes of God not rarely look!
A chronicle of actions, just and bright!
There all thy deeds, my faithful Mary, shine,
And since thou own'st that praise, I spare thee mine.

At this time Mrs. Unwin was afflicted with almost constant headaches, and a pain in the side, the cause of which was not understood; her lameness consequent upon her fall was very little amended, but her looks had not altered for the worse, "and her spirits," Cowper said, "were good, because supported by comforts which depend not on the state of the body." The time came when she was rendered, by infirmities of mind and body, as unlike her former self in other things, as she now was in strength.

There must have appeared a great amendment in Cowper's notions concerning his own spiritual state, after his last recovery; otherwise Mr. Bull, who was always a judicious friend, would not have requested him to compose a hymn. The application reached him, however, in a dark hour, and he replied thus[70], "My dear friend, ask possibilities and they shall be performed, but ask not hymns from a man suffering by despair as I do. I could not sing the Lord's song were it to save my life, banished as I am, not to a strange land, but to a remoteness from his presence, in comparison with which the distance from east to

[70] May 25, 1788.

west is no distance,—is vicinity and cohesion. I dare not, either in prose or verse, allow myself to express a frame of mind which I am conscious does not belong to me; least of all can I venture to use the language of absolute resignation, lest only counterfeiting, I should for that very reason be taken strictly at my word, and lose all my remaining comfort. Can there not be found among those translations of Madame Guyon somewhat that might serve the purpose? I should think there might. Submission to the will of Christ, my memory tells me, is a theme that pervades them all. If so, your request is performed already; and if any alteration in them should be necessary, I will with all my heart make it. I have no objection to giving the graces of the foreigner an English dress, but insuperable ones to all false pretences and affected exhibitions of what I do not feel."

In the ensuing year, Mr. Bean found him in a happier mood, and obtained from him a hymn to be sung by the children of the Olney Sunday school; at a time when Cowper said "he was somewhat in the case of lawyer Dowling in Tom Jones, and could he split himself into as many poets as there are Muses, could have found employment for them all." Encouraged, perhaps, by this, Mr. Newton asked him to translate for publication, a series of letters, which he had received from a Dutch clergyman at the Cape of Good Hope. Though so much additional occupation came inconveniently when he had little time to spare from his Homer, Cowper could not refuse this to Mr. Newton[71]; and he had no objection to being known as the

[71] To Mrs. King, June 14, 1790.

translator; "rather," said he, "I am ambitious of it as an honour. It will serve to prove, that if I have spent much time to little purpose, in the translation of Homer, some small portion of my time has, however, been well disposed of[72]."

Mr. Newton acted with the kindest intentions toward his poor friend, when he put these letters into his hands. There is nothing remarkable in the early part of the writer's history. His name was Van Lier, he was born in 1764, "of worthy parents and of respectable condition;" he was destined by them to the ministry, and educated accordingly; and in his boyhood he became strongly attached to a beautiful girl of his own age, whose family were intimate with his. To this lady, who is called Miss E., he made a declaration, by letter, from the university, and received for answer, that she could take no step in an affair of that sort without the knowledge and consent of her parents. This wounded his pride; he made advances to another lady, from whom he received a similar answer; then having frequent opportunities of seeing his first love, and finding that she had refused other offers, he soon ascertained that he was not indifferent to her, and obtained a promise of her hand, should the parents of both prove favourable to his wishes. "I was now," he said, "elevated to the pinnacle of joy, I accounted myself completely happy; and my heart, alas, full of idolatry, looked for felicity to the creature, regarding lightly the Creator, who is over all, blessed for ever."

At this time he describes himself as full of hatred, envy, and malice, destitute of religion, and vicious,

[72] To Mr. Newton, Oct. 15, 1790.

though externally seeming to deserve the praise of much decency. But among his scanty remains of virtue (" if any virtue," says he, " I had,) I still possessed a compassionate and beneficent disposition. I could not think much of any man oppressed with want and misery without painful sympathy. If the poor applied to me for relief, I assisted them willingly and gladly, and had sometimes a lively and grateful sense of my privilege. Yet even on such occasions I adverted not to the commandment of God, nor proposed to myself his glory as my object, but obeyed merely the dictates of natural instinct and sensibility." He had not indeed dived in the mud of German metaphysics, but he had dabbled in the puddles of French philosophy[73]. Still there was in his heart of hearts a living and preserving principle.

" Certain it is," says he, " that unless God had forbidden and interposed by his grace to prevent it, I should in all probability have gone forth a declared enemy of revelation, at least of all true and spiritual religion. In the meantime I was accustomed frequently to pray at night on my bed, and in a phrase and manner perfectly opposite to my own opinions. Among other things I asked for conversion, using ordinarily these words: 'Draw me, O Lord, and I will run after thee! convert me, and I shall be converted!'—a sin-

[73] Among the works which were very hurtful to him those of Enicdenus and Voltaire are specified. Enicdenus belongs to the same *Propria quæ maribus* as Mules Quince, (vol. i. p. 8, n.) But in the present case I can only guess that this may be a printer's *alias* for Helvetius,.. the shallowest coxcomb that ever employed his little wit in endeavouring to degrade and corrupt his fellow creatures.

gular instance of God's overruling power. My prayer evidently contradicted my own ideas and opinions, and I asked that which I neither believed possible, nor desirable. I prayed also for God's assistance that I might grow in talents and in wisdom, that my studies might prosper, that the projects with which pride and ambition prompted me might have good success, and that my love of Miss E. might have consequences answerable to my wishes. Finally, I prayed that my parents, kindred, tutors, and friends, might all be objects of the divine benediction. Sometimes through sleepiness, or other hinderances, my prayers were either sadly interrupted, or altogether neglected; but it cost me little regret, or solicitude. While I prayed in this manner, it generally happened that my mind was extraordinarily agitated, and I experienced great emotion; nor can I doubt that I was occasionally much assisted by what are termed the common operations of the Holy Spirit. During these exercises, if I mistake not, I was wont to represent to myself the divine presence as a glorious light in heaven, like that of the sun, which light seemed visible to my imagination. My devotions of this kind were accompanied with great fervour, and even with a species of joy. Yet I have cause to believe that they were sometimes followed by a more daring and presumptuous commission of sin, for (the duty once performed,) I seemed to have acquired a right to sin at my ease, and without disturbance.

"At this time I was sickly and debilitated. A sudden dread of death would occasionally torment me, especially in the evening, and when I was alone. I

often had a singular notion that death would be particularly unwelcome and terrible to me in the dusk of evening, or in the night, or even in a gloomy day; but that I could die willingly and gladly under a bright sun and a serene sky. These sudden alarms and terrors, however, produced no fruit. I neither know nor believe that at this time I had any thoughts at all of the necessity of regeneration and faith in Christ. My meditations were unfrequent, and such were my religious affections; accordingly they were never effectual to beget in me an earnest desire of a new heart, or of recovering the lost favour of God."

And now by studying the works of Turretine he became convinced of God's providence, the authority of scripture, and consequently the truth of revelation. At times he was moved in his solitary meditations to tears, though his heart "was still like the stony ground." "*Communion with God*, and *the enjoyment of him*, were expressions," he says, "with which I could hardly connect an idea; at least no such idea as would in any measure explain to me, why, and for what reason, the enjoyment of God is to be preferred to all the pleasures of the world, and to all enjoyment of the creature.—Sometimes, however, when in a clear night I saw the heavens spangled with stars, which I represented to myself as so many suns and worlds, I felt an ardent desire to be there; and, goaded by extreme curiosity, imagined it a most desirable and delightful privilege to spend an eternity in the contemplation of those systems. And could there but be a hope, (which at that time appeared, and still appears to me, not impossible,) that after death the soul may

be at liberty to visit and to make her remarks on that immense variety of worlds, then indeed I accounted a place in heaven a prize for which it became me to contend with unremitting earnestness."

In this state of mind he wrote a dissertation, at which he afterwards wondered much, for it seemed to have come from a mind seriously impressed with the importance of religion; and as he wrote rapidly, and without books, he marvelled how he should have stumbled upon such thoughts as were expressed there. "Among other matter," said he, "I reprehended and earnestly exhorted those who deny the effectual operations of the Holy Spirit, gravely expressing a wish that they may soon learn the reality of them from their own undoubted experience. Such was my wish for them; and, wretched creature that I was! I had neither the least knowledge or experience of that blessing myself, nor any care to acquire it."

He held then an office in the University, but during a vacation, though there were occupations which seemed to require his presence in college, he availed himself of some fair pretext for going home, because Miss E. was in his father's neighbourhood. It was agreed between them that in about two years he should accept a certain cure which had been offered him. Both were happy in the prospect; "but the purpose of God," says Van Lier, "was different; and, blessed be his name for ever! our purposes vanished like smoke, while his stood fast, and he performed all his pleasure." Not many days afterwards his betrothed began to show evident marks of declining health; she was soon confined to her bed, and every day diminished the hopes of

her recovery. "When on my daily enquiry," he says, "I was informed either that she was no better, or that her distemper rather increased, a sword seemed to pass through my heart, and harassed by inexpressible fears, what I should do I knew not. I prayed to my unknown God for the restoration of her health. Never, I think, shall I pray again with equal earnestness. Her disease raged daily more and more, and in a short time the danger became imminent. My terrors and agitations of mind keeping pace with her illness, had by this time increased to such a degree, that it became necessary for me, lest I should fall into absolute desperation, to contrive some employment or other, by which my distracted mind might in some measure be diverted to other objects. I determined to write a sermon, and, with consent of the minister of the place, to deliver it in public. A few days before the appointed time of delivery, I proceeded thus: I chose my text, spent some days in meditation on it, wrote down my thoughts, and committed the whole to memory. Thus I had not much leisure to advert to other things. The violence of my distress was at least alleviated, and my attention directed elsewhere. At the time fixed I mounted the pulpit.—(It was his first attempt as a preacher.)—The Lord did not suffer me (as justly and deservedly I might have been for my rashness and irreverence,) to be put to shame. I preached with much applause, and possibly not without some effect. On this and the following day the distemper seemed very much abated, and the health of Miss E. so far restored that I hoped in a short time to witness her complete recovery. My joy now

was proportioned to the pangs I had suffered. I saw her, and with great pleasure declared to her my former dread and anxiety on her account, as well as my present sincere delight in the assurance I seemed to have of her restoration. After this, while they were carrying her to her bed, she looked at me with eyes expressive of singular affection, full of the tenderest meaning, and fixed on me with an extraordinary seriousness of attention. From that hour I was never permitted to see her. The joy that I had conceived proved transient as it was sudden. The disease returned on her with redoubled force, and raged to such a degree that her sufferings were extreme. The next day, to the best of my remembrance, a physician of the first eminence was called in: he pronounced immediately her distemper most alarming, and so dangerous that he entertained very little hopes of her recovery. These words sounded in my ears like a terrible clap of thunder. In truth, my condition was most unhappy, agitated as my mind was with extreme terror, and torn with unutterable grief, I laboured, but it was with the utmost difficulty that I prevailed, to conceal in some measure the fearful state of my mind. In the meantime I had a horrible prospect before me of being present at her death,—a prospect that I could not bear to contemplate. I determined to leave her, and to depart suddenly from the place. Neither her condition, nor the state of my own mind would allow me to bid her adieu. Accordingly, without her knowledge, overwhelmed with sorrow and dejection, I abandoned my home, and returned to the University."

His first business there was to search the works of

a foreign physician, in which he remembered once to have read an account of the disease which now threatened to be fatal to his happiness. And finding a mode of treatment recommended there, which was little used in his own country, he wrote immediately to request it might be tried, and prayed with extraordinary affection that these remedies might have a good effect, and that she, without whom life seemed impossible to himself, might be restored. Sorrow and love combined taught him to pray fervently; he offered his supplications in various manners, and urged them on various pleas, and sometimes flattered himself that the means would be attended with the desired success. On the third day after his return to college, news came that she was not worse, and that his prescription would be used, if the physician had no objection; but a few hours only elapsed before a friend of the family called upon him with the tidings of her death.

At this he controlled himself so strongly, that he appeared to feel less than had been expected; but secretly he was in a state of desperation, and his mind so stunned as to have lost all power of reflection. Soon, however, he bestirred himself, walked forth, called on one and another, and thought of taking a short journey in hopes of some recreation; but the good providence of God, he says, would not suffer it. He then purchased some religious books which were at that time in high reputation: Walker's Sermons and Blair's were among them; but the one which first engaged his attention was Lavater's Prospect of Eternity. "A little hope dwelt in me," he proceeds, "that after death I should meet Miss E. again,—a hope that

sometimes supported and refreshed me. For that reason I searched diligently the writings of Lavater for arguments favourable to the opinion that we should know each other in a future life, and that the relations which obtain between us here will not entirely cease hereafter. At the same time I prayed to God that he would mitigate and do away the excessive sorrow with which I was tormented. But not one thought had I of faith in Christ and conversion." He had wished nothing so much as that he might be released by a sudden stroke from a life which had now become hateful; but Lavater's book soothed and strengthened him. He found more alleviation in reading religious works than in any other employment; and in this mood of mind, while musing over the Meditations of a certain Socinian, or rather Sceptic, on the principal truths of natural religion, which pleased him greatly by the elegant simplicity of the style, he found, most unexpectedly, a consolation which he had neither sought nor dreamt of. The case is singularly curious, and the whole narrative bears the stamp of sincerity.

"I was employed," says the happy writer, "in reading this socinianizing or sceptical author; I read him with close attention, and was absorbed in the meditations that he suggested. Suddenly awakened, as I may say, out of those musings, I thought on God and his works. An idea altogether extraordinary of the glory and majesty of God struck me. I had never in such manner represented God to myself as now. The eyes of my understanding being enlightened, I observed and admired in all his works to which I adverted, his stupendous power, wisdom, and goodness. I had

in my mind an apprehension of the splendour of his glory and presence perfectly new to me. It was not so much a *notion* that my illuminated intellect entertained of his infinite majesty and perfections, as it was a *sense* of them; they were so present to me that I *felt* them. The glory of his infinite Godhead and presence filled me with delight; and I saw so clearly his supreme worthiness of all my love and obedience, that my mind was carried by a sweet and irresistible force to love him with sincerity; and my heart, broken at the sight, abhorred its former ingratitude. I instantly conceived the purpose of a total reform in my conduct, of an universal attention to all his commandments, and to take them for my rule of life thenceforth without any exception. This appeared to me not only perfectly just and right, but easy also, and pleasant. I seemed to myself to have been hitherto the blindest and most ungrateful of creatures, who had never formed to myself such views of God before, who had neither loved nor obeyed him."

"From that memorable day my condition became widely different, and my course of life also.—I had acquired new ideas of God, of myself, of the vanity of earthly things, and of the inestimable value of grace and divine communion. I was translated, as it were, into a new world. Christ lived in me, although till then I had not known him, and thus I became a new creature. Old things had passed away, and all things were become new. In short, it is easier to conceive than to express what passed in my mind on the occasion.—Taught, therefore, by undoubted experience, I hence concluded that I had obtained by the incompre-

hensible and effectual grace of God that new birth, without which no man can see or enter the kingdom of God, and of which formerly, I had neither the desire, nor even the thought. My ideas now of the infinite excellence and loveliness of God, were lively and perspicuous. Such also were my apprehensions of my duty towards him, of my own excessive ingratitude and disobedience, and of God's powerful and unmerited grace, by which he had quickened me. Fears of the divine wrath I had none; no dread of punishment. That I deserved it indeed, and was utterly unworthy of his favour, I saw plainly; notwithstanding which, I never for a moment supposed myself an object of divine wrath, or feared lest I should suffer the punishment that I had deserved. It was a subject on which anxiety, fear, doubt, had no place in me. A lively perception of the divine glory and beauty, an unspeakable sense of his gracious presence, an experimental acquaintance with the delight that belongs to an effectual love to him; these things secured me from all such terrors, and filled me with exceeding joy. In such a state of mind I could not doubt one moment concerning my admittance to the divine favour and communion, for I had sensible experience of both; knowing myself, however, at the same time unworthy of them, and unable to account for the grant of them to *me*, otherwise than in virtue of the blood and spirit of Christ alone, the Son of God, and only Saviour of sinners."

One remarkable circumstance in Van Lier's story is, that though love had been "the scale by which to heavenly love he had ascended[74]," no sooner had this

[74] Milton.

new view of religion opened upon him, than his grief abated, and in fact almost entirely ceased. His mind was altogether engaged in other matters, and he could with his whole heart give thanks to God for that very deprivation which only a few days before had driven him almost to despair. The change was as effectual as it was sudden; he declares that from the moment when it befell, he never doubted, for a single hour, his vocation at that time from death to life, and from darkness into marvellous light; in so wonderful a manner had his prayers for an alleviation of his affliction been heard. Had he not seen and conversed with his beloved so short a time before her death, his sorrow would not have been so poignant; had he remained, and been present at her death, it would have entirely overpowered him; had he taken a journey as he proposed, the grief that urged him to read, meditate, and pray, would probably, he says, have soon lost much of its force; had it been more intense it would have become downright desperation, had it been less so, business and society would soon have dissipated it; wonderful he deemed it that he should have been impelled to purchase books, of which he heard only by accident exactly at that crisis: and most wonderful of all that it should have pleased God to give him the light of his own spirit, while he was reading a book, which, under a Christian title, contained much unchristian matter, and in which the divinity and satisfaction of Christ were both controverted.

As yet, however, he had no spiritual knowledge of many of the most important truths; on these he roved at random, and when he thought of our Saviour, his

ideas were deeply tinctured with the opinions either of the Arians or Socinians. "The Saviour," he says, "dwelt in me, as I may say, unknown to me, and held my eyes that I might not know him yet; although I was made partaker of his life, and as a member of his mystical body, derived from him, as from the head of that body, however unconscious of it, all the illumination, comfort, or spiritual strength that I enjoy.—While I was occupied in reading and considering the truths of God, even my body would be remarkably affected by the affections and enjoyments of my mind. My bosom seemed dilated as with the warmth of a gentle fire, which diffused through my whole frame the most agreeable sensations. In truth there was a wonderful intercourse between soul and body. As often as in the Scriptures, or the Socinian tract, or in Walker's or Blair's Sermons, I found mention made of Jesus, and meditated on him, on his life, his sufferings, and his righteousness, or on the privilege of union with him, I perceived my mind affected with sensible consolation and delight; yet it was not illuminated on these subjects, but rather much beclouded."

In this stage of his progress it appeared to him so possible that the Arminian, or even Socinian doctrines should be the true, that he had resolved in case they should appear so, upon diligent investigation, to embrace them, and renounce the Calvinistic church, painful as this must certainly prove to his parents and relations, and ruinous probably to himself. Whatever theological knowledge he had obtained, "was merely," he said, "superficial, natural, human. A spiritual apprehension of them was what I wanted; and had it

pleased God to withhold from me those sensible consolations, and to hide his face from me, without all question I had also had my terrors, my anguish, and my doubts, having no truly spiritual views of Jesus, or confidence in his blood and righteousness. But the Divine Wisdom took a different course. I was for a time permitted constantly to behold the face of God as that of a gracious Father. As often as the day returned, in my prayers, thanksgivings, contemplations and meditations on the works of God and on his infinite glory, I was filled with heavenly joy, and with the sweetest intimations of his presence. Thus therefore, under an affecting sense of his kindness, and indulged in the blessedness of communion with him, it was not possible that I should suffer fear or dread, or that I should doubt my eternal salvation, feeling, as I did, so sensibly the very principles of it within me."

It was now his delight to contemplate the visible creation; every day he attempted to represent to himself, by force of imagination, in a lively manner, this globe of earth, suspended with its atmosphere in ether, revolving at once around the sun and its own axis.—Then calling imagination home, he endeavoured to impress his mind with an idea of himself, as a skeleton, clothed with muscles and nerves, furnished with exquisite sensitive organs, with a multiplicity of instruments artfully constructed and adapted to many admirable uses, and in which skeleton resides *this self*, that is the reasonable soul, connected with it by an unintelligible bond of union. Such contemplations he sometimes, but not wisely, he says, thought sufficient of themselves, if rightly managed, for the conversion of

any man. But he recommended this to some of his friends, and was disappointed of the desired effect.

Sure of his vocation, though unsettled in the articles of his faith, he declined a settlement which was offered him in the University, deeming the work of the ministry preferable to all other employments; and as at this time a heavy and most unexpected calamity befell his family, and threatened their whole house with poverty and dishonour, he hastened his own ordination, that he might be enabled to maintain himself, and assist his distressed relations. In the course of the studies preparatory for his examination he read at intervals Hervey's Theron and Aspasio,—and by this book, he says, it pleased God to teach him the truths of the Gospel. His faith and hope stood now on firmer ground. Soon after his first ordination, he met with Mr. Newton's *Cardiphonia*, for this book also had been translated into Dutch. I read it, he says, again and again, with a most unreserved assent, and with great pleasure and benefit. The Holy Spirit accompanied my repeated reading of it with an extraordinary measure of his quickening grace and illumination; insomuch that I hold myself indebted, under God, to that book for much spiritual knowledge and comfort, and for much encouragement to all goodness."

All that appears farther in these letters is, that having entered upon the ministry, and finally settled at the Cape—(though the place is not mentioned, nor any other throughout the narrative, the writer wishing to remain unknown,)—God gave him largely of the good things of this world; and he enjoyed a wonder-

ful portion of divine assistance in the performance of both public and private duty. Nevertheless, he was pestered with most painful and unusual temptations of the Devil, so that sometimes the whole host of hell combined seemed to assail him with all their fury. He believed that by this God principally purposed to preserve him from being exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelation made to him.

While the six letters containing this narrative, which he sent over to Mr. Newton for publication, were in the press, another was received, stating that his health was on the decline; that he was troubled with a violent cough, suffered much in the night from the weak state of his nerves, and was reduced to great bodily weakness; and the mind partaking of the body's decay, he could sometimes neither think, nor speak, nor write. "Perhaps," he concludes, "I shall write to you no more. Perhaps this may be the last letter you will receive from me; and perhaps before it reaches you, I shall have already left this world. Should you hear of my departure, do not mourn; but rather rejoice, and praise God on my behalf. I am well persuaded that Christ is my life, and therefore death will not be loss, but gain to me.—Oh happy and glorious hour, when I shall be delivered from all trouble and sin, from this body of death, from the wicked world, and from the snares of Satan! When I shall appear before my Saviour without spot; and shall so behold his glory and be filled with his presence, as to be wholly and for ever engaged in adoration, admiration, gratitude, and love! What should I fear? Jesus died and lives for me. For what should I grieve? Jesus is mine, and

with him I have all things. Yet a little while, and every evil shall cease. I shall see him as he is, and be with him for ever!"

Mr. Newton published these letters as an illustration of the Power of Grace, taking these words of St. Paul for a motto, "the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power[75]." "My dear friend the translator," he said, "is so well known, that I scarcely need add, I could have applied to no one more capable of doing justice to the writer, or of giving satisfaction to the reader. I think the relation will not be thought too minute or circumstantial by competent judges; I mean by those who are attentive to the workings of the human heart, and who acknowledge and admire the superintendence of a Divine Providence over the concerns of mankind. The man was suddenly and totally changed. The servant of sin became the devoted servant of God. The fact is evident and incontrovertible. Let philosophers account for it, if they can, upon any other grounds than what the Scripture assigns. But let them be serious, and not think to answer or evade the inquiry, by the stale, unmeaning cry of enthusiasm. They cannot thus satisfy others; nor even themselves." .. Mr. Newton was easily satisfied, .. as easily as Van Lier himself, who, when wavering between Calvinism, Arminianism, and Socinianism, was fixed in the Torrid Zone by a perusal of—Theron and Aspasio! Motives of the same kind which had formerly made him call Cowper's attention to the case of Simon Browne, induced him to engage his poor friend in translating these letters, wherein they

[75] 1 Cor. iv. 20.

both saw the power of Grace, and perceived nothing else. Cowper had long been accustomed to confound bodily sensations with spiritual impressions; this narrative failed to revive in him the feelings with which he left St. Alban's; the good, therefore, which had been hoped for was not produced; but neither did the evil consequence follow of confirming him in that dangerous error, .. for it was already fixed in him too firmly to be shaken.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

AND

ILLUSTRATIONS.

Franklin, p. 28.—A letter which has come to my hands just as these notes are going to the press, shows the channel through which Cowper's first volume was conveyed to this distinguished person. Writing to Mr. Powley, (p^mo. June, 1782,) Mr. Thornton says, "I transmitted Mr. Cowper a copy of a letter I had from Dr. Franklin, to whom I sent his Poems by Mr. Walker, of Rotherham, when he went lately to Paris; and he gave a spirited French answer, but not from the heart. However, as you will see by Mr. Cowper's reply, it answered a good purpose."

I should feel it to be a sin of omission were I not to add, that the letter from which this passage is transcribed, enclosed twenty pounds for the poor of a distant parish.

Extract from the Elbow Chair, by the Rev. E. Cooper, p. 43.

——— At the sound
Of deep-mouth'd beagles all the soul's on fire.
Up from the bed of sloth, thou lazy cit,
And meet the morning's freshest locks, and hear
The hills and dales resound with joyful cries!
Here bring thy courser to the sylvan train,
And join the mutual cry: for buxom health
Repays our toil, and o'er the nut-brown jug
At night the mirthful tale inspires the soul.
Here will I sit upon the verdant side
Of this known hill: observe the merry crew,
With sense sagacious (as they quest along),
Now catch the' informing gale: what sweet-toned thunder
Rolls tremulous along the winding vale!

For Trimbush now confirms the doubtful strife,
And all the pack his well-known voice obey.
Quick see the hare skim o'er the lessening plain,
In view, the general chorus loud resounds.
Such charming music never did I hear;
For, Somerville! a cry more tuneable,
" Was never hallow'd to, nor cheer'd with horn,"
E'en woods and dales rejoiced, and join'd the cry.
Swift as the bounding roe yon coursers fly,
Outstrip the wind, and skim along the mead.
Now to yon grove, where, playful oft and young,
The leveret peaceful stray'd, a refuge there
She seeks in vain: for ah! here echoing yell
With double fury bursts upon her ear:
In doubling mazes now she seeks to foil
The' approaching foe: but mind yon steady hound,
(Whose age experience in the pleasing chase
Oft times has taught,) now with a glorious thirst
Of generous ardour eager speed his way;
A certain sign, that now she sinks—and dies.
The strepent horn confirms the joyful news,
And all around shrill propagates the sound.
These *are the sports of Wetshmen:* did ye know
The luxury of sleep, ye sons of ease,
Oft got by rural pastime, ye would scorn
The blandishments of down, and all the arts
Emollient, which disgrace the race of men.

" Some very faulty lines, and useless epithets we have observed in this poem; but as the good-humoured author appears to be quite snug and happy in his Elbow Chair, we are unwilling to disturb him by descending to particular animadversions, and more especially as the random, incoherent nature of the piece may seem to claim an exemption from a too rigid trial by the laws of criticism."—*Monthly Review*, for 1765, vol. xxxiii.

Lace-makers, p. 52.—Children are taught to make lace at about six or seven years old; and they occupy so much of the attention of their school-mistress, that the expense of teaching them amounts to three shillings per week, for a month or six weeks, according to their capacity. After they have learned

the rudiments of the art, their ordinary schooling is sixpence per week.

The business of school-mistress for lace-makers is performed by the wives of some of the cottagers, who are in the most comfortable circumstances.

The children are frequently two years before they earn more than pays the expense of their thread and schooling.

At about ten years of age, those of an ordinary capacity will earn about two shillings per week; and at thirteen, if well attended to, they are supposed to cause little further expense to their parents.

A young girl of sixteen, if not neglected by her friends, will be capable of earning as much money at the lace-pillow as at any time in future life; and the average earnings of full grown females is supposed to be very nearly six shillings per week. There are some, I am informed, who scarcely clear five shillings per week; and a few extreme cases have been mentioned of earnings as high as eight shillings or nine shillings per week. The expense of thread is stated at about one-eighth of the gross value of the lace; and a portion of time is consumed in washing and mending of clothes, selling of the lace, &c.

The lace-makers begin their work in summer at six or seven in the morning, and finish at sun-set, or the dusk of the evening. In the winter, little is done till eight or nine o'clock in the morning, or after breakfast, when they continue their work till ten or eleven at night, and sometimes later.—*Batchelor's Agricultural Survey of Bedfordshire*, p. 595.

Rhymed tragedies, p. 111.—Johnson says, "the practice of making tragedies in rhyme was introduced, as it seems, by the Earl of Orrery, in compliance with the opinion of Charles II., who had formed his taste by the French theatre; and Dryden who wrote, and made no difficulty of declaring that he wrote only to please, and who perhaps knew that by his dexterity of versification he was more likely to excel others in rhyme than without it, very readily adopted his master's preference."

It was not necessary for Johnson to mention that our earliest plays, both tragedy and comedy, were in rhyme; this he may have supposed his readers to have known, after the publication of Dodsley's selection of Old Plays. But if he had remem-

bered the tragedies of Daniel, Lord Brook, and Lord Sterline, he would have noticed them. Those, of the two latter, however, were not designed for representation, and were composed, with more or less resemblance, upon the ancient model. The rhymes, too, were not in couplets, and the pieces were rather dramatic poems than plays.

Riding rhyme, p. 116.—If Dr. Warton had remembered the opinion expressed in this appellation, he would not have censured Pope for modernizing Chaucer's story of January and May in the same measure as the original. "Pope," he says, "has endeavoured suitably to familiarize the stateliness of our heroic measure in this ludicrous narrative; but after all his pains, this measure is not adapted to such subjects so well as the lines of four feet, or the French numbers of Fontaine."—*Essay on Pope*, vol. ii. p. 5.

Dryden's conversion to the Church of Rome, p. 132.

My thoughtless youth was wing'd with vain desires;
My manhood, long misled by wandering fires,
Followed false lights, and when their glimpse was gone,
My pride struck out new sparkles of her own.
Such was I, such by nature still I am;
Be thine the glory, and be mine the shame.
Good life be now my task: my doubts are done:
What more could fright my faith, than three in one?
Can I believe eternal God could be
Disguised in mortal mould and infancy?
That the great Maker of the world could die?
And after that, trust my imperfect sense,
Which calls in question his omnipotence?
Can I my reason to my faith compel?
And shall my sight, and touch, and taste rebel?
Superior faculties are set aside;
Shall their subservient organs be my guide?
Then let the moon usurp the rule of day,
And winking tapers show the sun his way!
Hind and Panther.

Any one who understood the grounds of the Protestant faith

might have quoted to Dryden upon this notable passage, his own words,—

> — Winnow well this thought, and you shall find
> 'Tis light as chaff that flies before the wind!

The mysteries of the Trinity, of the Divinity of our Saviour, and of the real presence, are believed by the Church of England, because the belief of that church is founded upon the scriptures, and the scriptures only. Dryden's error upon the latter point lay in confounding the mystery of the real presence with the figment of transubstantiation.

But when Dryden wrote the *Religio Laici*, a strong sense of the mischiefs produced by sectarianism had prepared him for his subsequent change. In the preface to that poem, after showing what were the real dangers from Popery, he speaks of that other extreme of our religion, the fanatics, or schismatics of the English Church. "Since the Bible," says he, "has been translated into our tongue, they have used it so as if their business was not to be saved, but to be damned by its contents. If we consider only them, better had it been for the English nation that it had still remained in the original Greek and Hebrew, or at least in the honest Latin of St. Jerome, than that several texts in it should have been prevaricated to the destruction of that government which put it into so ungrateful hands.—Many of them who had been in France and Geneva brought back the rigid opinions and imperious discipline of Calvin to graft upon our reformation, which though they cunningly concealed at first, as well knowing how nauseously that drug would go down in a lawful monarchy which was prescribed for a rebellious commonwealth, yet they always kept it in reserve; and were never wanting to themselves either in court or parliament when they had any prospect of a numerous party of fanatic members of the one, or the encouragement of any favourite in the other, whose covetousness was gaping at the patrimony of the church.—To their ignorance all things are wit which are abusive; but if church and state were made the theme, then the doctoral degree of wit was to be taken at Billingsgate: even the most saintlike of the party, though they durst not excuse their contempt and vilifying of the government, yet were pleased, and grinned at it with a pious smile, and called it a judgement of God against the hierarchy. Thus sectaries we

may see were born with teeth, foul-mouthed and scurrilous from their infancy; and if spiritual pride, venom, violence, contempt of superiors, and slander, had been the marks of orthodox belief, the presbytery, and the rest of our schismatics, which are their spawn, were always the most visible church in the Christian world.

"While we were papists, our holy father led us by pretending authority out of the scriptures to depose princes. When we shook off his authority, the sectaries furnished themselves with the same weapons, and out of the same magazine, the Bible; so that the scriptures, which are in themselves the greatest security of governors, as commanding express obedience to them, are now turned to their destruction; and never since the reformation has there wanted a text of their interpreting to authorize a rebel. And it is to be noted by the way, that the doctrines of king-killing and deposing, which have been taken up only by the worst party of the papistry, the most frontless flatterers of the pope's authority, have been espoused, defended, and are still maintained by the whole body of nonconformists and republicans. It is but dubbing themselves the people of God, which it is the interest of their preachers to tell them they are, and their own interest to believe; and after that they cannot dip into the Bible, but one text or another will turn up for their purpose: if they are under persecution, as they call it, then that is a mark of their election; if they flourish, then God works miracles for their deliverance, and the saints are to possess the earth."—*Preface to Religio Laici.*

The pinchbeck age of poetry, p. 141.—"Indeed it is not without reason that poetry is now generally held in little esteem; in general modern poetry deserves but little. Since the happy invention of printing this species of literature has gradually sunk into disregard; and the reason is obvious. Every dull pretender to the Muse finds means to get his compositions, be they ever so bad, into print, and then the public is pestered with them, according to the various circumstances and degrees of the author's necessities or vanity. It was otherwise among the ancients, who saw every thing in manuscript. Nobody would take the trouble of transcribing bad things, except their authors; and even they were under the less temptation of being

either at the pains of copying their works themselves, or the expense of paying others to do it for them, as doubtless they always found it difficult enough to get them off at such a price as would be deemed equivalent to the trouble or charge. Hence it is that we have so few bad books from the ancients, and hence it was that poetry acquired more universal esteem and honour with them than it does with us. They seldom met with any but the works of such excellent geniuses as to this day are greatly valued and admired. But in our later times, so large has been the inundation of rhyming trumpery from the press, that even the name of a poet and of poetry are become so cheap, so contemptible, and in some instances so abominable, that a real genius is often ashamed to be ranked among the sons of the Muses, though in company even with Homer, Horace, and Milton."—*Monthly Review*, vol. iv. Nov. 1750, pp. 28, 29.

Fifteen years later (1765) the same journal speaks of " the herd of poetasters with which the pamphlet-shops, the Magazines, the Chronicles, the Evening Posts, the Advertisers, the Gazetteers, the Weekly Journals, and even the very Almanacks are pestered. It is said a remedy has been found for the epidemical distemper among the cattle: we are sorry that no one in this nostrum-inventing age has yet discovered a cure for the poetical murrain by which so many of his majesty's subjects are totally lost—to society."—vol. xxxii. p. 75.

The art of poetry was made easy to the meanest capacity, p. 142. —" There is a great deal of cant in the style of poetry, especially of modern poetry. A set of epithets, and figures, and phrases, which a certain set of versifiers bring in upon all occasions, in order to make out their verses and prepare their rhymes,—if a poet has got a good stock of these, and a knack of applying them, and is not very solicitous about energy, consistency, or truth of sentiment, he may write verses with great ease and rapidity; but such verses are not read above once or twice, and are seldom or never remembered."—*Beattie. Forbes's Life*, vol. ii. p. 13.

" There are authors without one original power of the mind, who can pour out mechanical verses with an inexhaustible vein. Let an acute critic examine these verses, and he will trace with the most unqualified certainty the echo of mere *words* impressed

by the author's study of original writers; to which words, from the use made of them, from the jumbled combination, and the utter want of any intelligible train of ideas, it will be demonstrable that no distinct images or thoughts are affixed. It is possible that they may excite some confused activity in the writer's brains; but the words are only suggested, and follow one another by some *mechanical link*. Or if we admit that they convey to the author's mind the ideas which they properly represent, still in such authors the words lead the thoughts, and not the thoughts the words.

"There is scarce any class of writers more contemptible than these. All false pretence is always disgusting in itself; and doubly so, because it has a tendency to degrade what is true, by exposing it to be confounded with the false by the ignorant multitude."—*Sir Egerton Brydges's Recollections of Foreign Travels*, vol. i. p. 240.

His taste had been influenced by the set with which he associated in early life, p. 146.—Lloyd was manly enough to write and insert in his Magazine, in the form of an epistle to himself, a remonstrance upon this subject.

I hate the stile that still defends
Yourself, or praises all your friends,
As if the club of wits was met
To make eulogiums on *the set*.
Say, must the town for ever hear,
And no reviewer dare to sneer,
Of Thornton's humour, Garrick's nature,
And Colman's wit, and Churchill's satire?
Churchill, who—let it not offend
If I make free, though he's your friend;
And sure we cannot want excuse,
When Churchill's named, for smart abuse;—
Churchill, who ever loves to raise
On slander's dung his mushroom bays.
The priest, I grant, has something clever,
A something that will last for ever.
Let him in part be made your pattern,
Whose Muse, now queen, and now a slattern,

Trick'd out in Rosciad, rules the roast,
Turns trapes and trollop in the Ghost,
By turns both tickles us and warms,
And drunk, or sober, has her charms.

* * *

And Colman too, that little sinner,
That essay-weaver, drama-spinner,
Too much the comic *sock* will use,
For 'tis the law must find him *shoes*;
And though he thinks on fame's wide ocean
He swims, and has a pretty motion,
Inform him, Lloyd, for all his grin,
That Harry Fielding holds his chin.

Now higher soar, my Muse, and higher,
To Bonnell Thornton, hight Esquire;
The only man to make us laugh,
A very Peter Paragraph;
The grand conductor and adviser
In Chronicle and Advertiser,
Who still delights to run his rig
On citizen and periwig.
Good sense, I know, though dash'd with oddity,
In Thornton is no scarce commodity:
Much learning too, I can descry,
Beneath *his* periwig doth lie.—
I beg his pardon; I declare
His grizzle's gone for greasy hair,
Which now the wag with ease can screw
With dirty riband in a queue.
But why neglect (his trade forsaking
For scribbling and for merry-making,)
With tye to overshade that brain
Which might have shone in Warwick Lane?
Why not, with spectacle on nose,
In chariot lazily repose,
A formal, pompous, deep physician,
Himself a sign-post exhibition?

St. James's Mag. April, 1763, pp. 114, 115, 116.

Churchill, p. 160.—Heartily as Churchill hated the Scotch, he was himself of the half-blood. This appears from a passage in the Prophecy of Famine, remarkable also for containing an unequivocal intimation that he had renounced not only his orders, but his belief.

> Once, be the hour accursed, accursed the place!
> I ventured to blaspheme the chosen race.
> Into those traps, which men, call'd Patriots, laid,
> By specious arts unwarily betray'd,
> *Madly I leagued against that sacred earth,*
> *Vile parricide! which gave a parent birth.*
> But shall I meanly Error's path pursue,
> When heavenly Truth presents her friendly clue?
> Once plunged in ill, shall I go farther in?
> To make the oath was rash; to keep it, sin.
> Backward I tread the paths I trod before,
> And calm reflection hates what passion swore.
> Converted, (blessed are the souls which know
> Those pleasures which from true conversion flow,
> *Whether to reason, who now rules my breast,*
> Or to pure faith, like Littelton and West,)
> Past crimes to expiate, be my present aim
> To raise new trophies to the Scottish name.
>
> V. 217—234.

Churchill's dislike of Pope, p. 164.—One of the most poetical passages in Gotham would have been disfigured by an expression of this feeling, if he had not wisely struck out a couplet so ill in keeping with all that preceded and followed it.

> Farewell, ye Muses!—though it cuts my heart,
> E'en to the quick, we must for ever part.
> When the fresh morn bade lusty Nature wake;
> When the birds, sweetly twittering through the brake,
> Tune their soft pipes; when from the neighb'ring bloom
> Sipping the dew, each zephyr stole perfume;
> When all things with new vigour were inspired,
> And seem'd to say they never could be tired;
> How often have we stray'd, while sportive rhyme
> Deceived the way, and clipp'd the wings of Time,

O'er hill, o'er dale, how often laugh'd to see,—
Yourselves made visible to none but me,—
The clown, his works suspended, gape and stare,
And seem to think that I conversed with air.
When the sun, beating on the parched soil,
Seem'd to proclaim an interval of toil;
When a faint languor crept through every breast,
And things most used to labour wish'd for rest;
How often underneath a rev'rend oak,
Where safe, and fearless of the impious stroke,
Some sacred Dryad lived: or in some grove
Where, with capricious fingers, Fancy wove
Her fairy bower, whilst Nature all the while
Look'd on, and view'd her mockeries with a smile,
Have we held converse sweet! how often laid,
Fast by the Thames, in Ham's inspiring shade,
Amongst those poets which make up your train,
And after death pour forth the sacred strain,
Have I, at your command, in verse grown gray,
But not impair'd, heard Dryden tune that lay
Which might have drawn an angel from his sphere,
And kept him from his office list'ning here.
[1] When dreary Night, with Morpheus in her train,
Led on by Silence to resume her reign,
With darkness covering, as with a robe,
The scene of levity, blank'd half the globe,
How oft, enchanted with your heavenly strains,
Which stole me from myself,—which in soft chains
Of music bound my soul,—how oft have I,
Sounds more than human floating through the sky,
Attentive sat, whilst Night, against her will,
Transported with the harmony, stood still!
How oft in raptures, which man scarce could bear,
Have I, when gone, still thought the Muses there,
Still heard their music, and as mute as death,
Sat all attention, drew in every breath,

[1] Wilkes afterwards printed the two lines which had been properly struck out from this place, they were these—

Whilst Pope with envy stung, inflamed with pride,
Piped to the vacant air on t'other side.

Lest, breathing all too rudely, I should wound
And mar that magic excellence of sound;
Then, sense returning with return of day,
Have chid the night, which fled so fast away.
  Such my pursuits, and such my joys of yore,
Such were my mates, but now my mates no more.
Placed out of Envy's walk, (for Envy, sure,
Would never haunt the cottage of the poor,
Would never stoop to wound my homespun lays,)
With some few friends, and some small share of praise,
Beneath oppression, undisturb'd by strife,
In peace I trod the humble vale of life.

Gotham, b. iii. v. 389—448.

Descriptive poetry, p. 175.—One who in Cowper's days had seated himself in the seat of the critic, delivered an unfavourable opinion of descriptive poems. "That poetry," he said, "which is employed in rural description lies under many disadvantages. Though there is a variety, there is, likewise, an uniformity in the works of nature, which renders it difficult to embellish such subjects with images that have not been exhibited by former writers. With regard to the moralizing of rural paintings, it is almost always attended with quaintness and a forced manner;—nor is it difficult to investigate the cause: all moral truths are of an abstracted nature, and when we attempt to illustrate them by objects of the senses, the transition from the natural simplicity of the latter to the refinement of the former, is incompatible with that ease which we expect to find in poetical descriptions, and interrupts that attention which we are always inclined to afford. The descriptive poet should leave the discovery of the moral to the sagacity of his readers; by which means they will be flattered with the indulgence of their own penetration: and this a skilful writer may always effect, by rendering the moral conclusion obvious, without drawing it himself."—*Monthly Review*, vol. xxxvii. p. 16.

Mason composed his plays upon an artificial model, and in a gorgeous diction, because he thought Shakespeare had precluded all hope of excellence in any other form of drama, p. 177.

How oft I cried, " Oh come, thou tragic Queen!
March from thy Greece with firm majestic tread,
Such as when Athens saw thee fill her scene,
When Sophocles thy choral Graces led;
Saw thy proud pall its purple length devolve;
Saw thee uplift the glittering dagger high;
Ponder, with fixed brow, thy deep resolve,
Prepared to strike, to triumph, and to die.
Bring then to Britain's plain that choral throng;
Display thy buskin'd pomp, thy golden lyre;
Give her historic forms the soul of song,
And mingle Attic art with SHAKESPEARE's fire!"
" Ah, what, fond boy, dost thou presume to claim?"
The Muse replied: " Mistaken suppliant, know,
To light in SHAKESPEARE's breast the dazzling flame,
Exhausted all PARNASSUS could bestow.
True, Art remains; and if, from his bright page
Thy mimic power one vivid beam can seize,
Proceed; and in that best of tasks engage,
Which tends at once to profit, and to please."
She spake; and Harewood's towers spontaneous rose,
Soft virgin warblings echoed through the grove;
And fair ELFRIDA pour'd forth all her woes,
The hapless pattern of connubial love.
More awful scenes old Mona next display'd;
Her caverns gloom'd, her forests waved on high,
While flamed within their consecrated shade
The genius stern of British liberty.

Epistle to Hurd.

Mason ingenuously confessed that he was too much elated by popular applause, p. 177.

Too long, alas, my inexperienced youth,
Misled by flattering Fortune's specious tale,
Has left the rural reign of peace and truth,
The huddling brook, cool cave, and whispering vale;

Won to the world, a candidate for praise,
Yet, let me boast, by no ignoble art,
Too oft the public ear has heard my lays,
Too much its vain applause has touch'd my heart.
Elegy written in the Garden of a Friend, 1758.

Mason's Elfrida and Caractacus represented with success, p. 177. —I saw them both, in my boyhood, at Bath and Bristol, and well remember Mrs. Siddons as Elfrida, before she appeared in London.

"Elfrida," says the Monthly Review, (Dec. 1772,) "overcame all our common prejudices against the ancient form of tragedy, especially against the Chorus. Mr. Colman, therefore, deserves praise for introducing on the stage, under his direction, so elegant a performance: and as a proof of the skill and judgement with which he has endeavoured to render it a pleasing exhibition to every class of the spectators, we must add, for the information of our distant readers, that it hath been received with a much warmer, more general, and more lasting approbation than, perhaps, even the most sanguine admirers of the poem could have expected from a work which the author never intended for theatrical representation."

Spenser depreciated, p. 179.

Ye haunt not that licentious grove
Where Spenser's desperate champions rove;
Your chaste ear loves not to be told
Of blatant Beasts, of dread Despair,
With glaring eyes, with clotted hair,
And brutal chivalries of old.

Thus it is that Michael Wodhull blasphemes Spenser in an Ode to the Dryads; and the Monthly Reviewers (Jan. 1764) were "glad to find that he agreed with them in disapproving the filthy images, and the loathsome, bloody allegories of the Faery Queen!"

In an earlier volume this journal had praised Spenser, but called for a translation into modern English!

In reviewing an anonymous poem on the Seasons, in imitation of Spenser, (1751,) the critic, who says that the author's imagi-

nation glows with a warmth superior to that of Spenser, has the following notable remarks.

"If the exploded words which render the English writers of Queen Elizabeth's days almost unintelligible to the present age, are *justly exploded*, and totally disused in every other branch of literature, why, in the name of common sense, are they every now and then raised from the dead by our poets? Is the modern English, as it appears in the works of an Addison, a Swift, or a Bolingbroke, at all the worse for the want of such words as *eftsoons*, *wend*, *reckless*, *muchel*, *eft*, *erst*, and many thousands still more barbarous, and very justly condemned to those glossaries where they ought to rest in peace? If our author would give us a good *translation* of Spenser's works into modern English, free from those unintelligible words and phrases, which to his misfortune, he was obliged to use, we are persuaded that admirable poet would be read by many who cannot endure the unpoetical harshness of his original language. Nor, indeed, is his laboured stanza at all agreeable to those who love *ease* in reading; it is mere slavery to many to preserve at once clear ideas of his sense, and of the *mechanism*, order, and jingle of his versification and rhymes."—May, 1751, p. 520.

Pope's epic, p. 196.—"Under the title of Alfred," it is said in the letter, more probably by an error in Cowper's recollection, than a printer's bold alteration of an unknown name to a known one.

Pope wrote an epic poem when very young; it was in rhyme, and was called Alcander. He planned another many years afterwards upon the story of Geoffrey of Monmouth's Brutus; and this he meant to be in blank verse. Cowper's mistake seems to have proceeded from a confused recollection of the name of the first, and the subject of the second; the former began with *Al*, the latter was taken from our early history; and so he hit upon Alfred.

A more ludicrous error of association, occurring in a similar way, came under my own observation. Among the four-footed acquaintance with whom I used to exchange a greeting when we met, was a terrier, named Esop. A friend who accompanied me often enough in my walks to notice the salutations that passed between us, always called him Jacob; the connecting link in his mind was Esau.

Letter referred to, p. 224.

TO MRS. NEWTON, AT MR. PRINDER'S, NORTHAMPTON.

I HOPE, my dear madam, this will meet you well, and safely returned thus far on your journey. Though it will be a sincere pleasure to me to see you and dear Mr. Newton again, yet I beg you will not put yourselves to the least inconvenience or hurry to reach home, till the most fit and agreeable time. The Lord is very gracious to us; for though the cloud of affliction still hangs heavy on Mr. Cowper, yet he is quite calm and persuadable in every respect. He has been for these few days past more open and communicative than heretofore. It is amazing how subtilly the cruel adversary has worked upon him; and wonderful to see how the Lord has frustrated his wicked machinations; for though he has not seen good to prevent the most violent temptations and distressing delusions, yet he has prevented the mischievous effects the enemy designed by them: a most marvellous story will this dear child of God have to relate, when, by his Almighty power, he is set at liberty. As nothing short of Omnipotence could have supported him through this sharp affliction, so nothing less can set him free from it. I allow that means are, in general, not only lawful but also expedient; but in the present case, we must, I am convinced, advert to our first sentiment, that this is a peculiar and exempt one, and that the Lord Jehovah will be alone exalted when the day of deliverance comes.

I must beg the favour of you to buy for me two pounds of chocolate, half a pound or ten ounces of white sixpenny worsted, half a dozen lemons, and two sets of knitting needles, six in a set, one the finest that can be got, of iron and steel, the other a size coarser. Sally nor Judy know of my writing, else I am sure they would desire me to insert their duty. Pray present my affectionate remembrance to Mr. Newton, and my sincere respects to Mr. and Mrs. Prinder, and Miss Smith; and believe me to be, my dearest madam, your truly affectionate and highly indebted friend,

Oct. 7, 1773. M. UNWIN.

Mr. Newton saw the unfitness of fiery and sulphureous preaching, p. 256.—"Very alarming books are not the most suitable for

ignorant folks, and especially, if, as is generally the case, gross ignorance is found combined with great wickedness. The evil and desert of sin, and its certain and terrible consequences, unless repented of and forsaken, ought doubtless to be insisted on; but it is the grace of the gospel that softens and wins the heart. By nature and practice we are in a state of alienation from God; we form hard thoughts of him, and therefore do not like to think of him at all, because we know not his name,—his true character. The gospel tells us that *God is love*, and gives this astonishing proof, that he gave his own Son to die for his enemies. Many daring sinners need not to be told that their state is dangerous; they feel it, and the more the thought is pressed upon them, the more their enmity against God is increased; they know they can neither resist nor escape; they have nothing to hope, but every thing to fear, and therefore they hate him.

"A friend of mine was desired to visit a woman in prison; he was informed of her evil habits of life, and therefore spoke strongly of the terrors of the Lord, and the curses of the law: she heard him awhile, and then laughed in his face; upon this he changed his note, and spoke of the Saviour, and what he had done and suffered for sinners. He had not talked long in this strain before he saw a tear or two in her eyes; at length she interrupted him by saying, 'Why, sir, do you think there can be any hope of mercy for me?' He answered, 'Yes, if you feel your need of it, and are willing to seek it in God's appointed way. I am sure it is as free for you as for myself.' She replied, 'Ah! if I had thought so, I should not have been in this prison. I long since settled it in my mind that I was utterly lost; that I had sinned beyond all possibility of forgiveness; and that made me desperate.' He visited her several times, and when she went away, (for she was transported,) he had good reason to hope that she was truly converted. He gave me this relation more than forty years ago, and it has been, I hope, of some use to me through the course of my ministry. Christ crucified, is the wisdom and power of God."—*Letter from Mr. Newton. Roberts's Life of H. Moore*, vol. iii. p. 7.

In a letter to Mr. Thornton, he says, "To the best of my judgement, I preach a full Saviour, and a free Gospel. But the Lord's work here is in such a line, that it is usually long before

my people can triumph. I know no people (taken collectively) more spiritual and humble, who set a higher value upon the means of grace, walk more affectionately towards each other, and towards their minister, or give less cause to the world to speak evil of the way; but it is usually a good while before they obtain a firm assurance, though, I bless God, they do obtain it gradually. Dear Mary Lambert, who I believe could sing the song in Isaiah xii. as stedfastly and joyfully as most people upon earth, was fourteen years in much exercise and temptation, before the Lord turned her mourning into joy, though she was an earnest seeker, and an exemplary walker, from her first awakening. Something like this is the experience of most of them. It has been sometimes a trouble to me, that they have been so slow to receive comfort; but when I have seen their simplicity, stedfastness, and humility, and that the Lord has, in many instances, made the subsequent building of grace striking and glorious, in proportion to the time he employs in laying the foundation and giving them a deep sense of what is in their hearts, I have been more reconciled, and willing that He should take his own method, as indeed He will, for He keeps the key of comfort in his own hand. Indeed I can seldom triumph myself; but, blessed be his name, I have peace. I know whom I have believed, and his Spirit bears witness with my conscience that I have no allowed pursuit, but to serve him with my all, to obtain more of his image and more of his presence. The much that I feel within me contrary to his will, though it does not prevent my confidence, makes me walk softly."

Olney, Dec. 15, 1775.

Cowper never lost sight of the original in his corrections, and Pope utterly disregarded it, p. 294.—When I was looking, says Spence, on his foul copy of the Iliad, and observing how very much it was corrected and interlined, he said, "I believe you will find, upon inquiry, that those parts which have been the most corrected, read the easiest."—Upon this Spence observes, "What a useful study ought it to be for a poet, in those parts that are changed to compare what was writ first with the successive alterations, to learn his turns and arts in versification, and to consider the reason why such and such an alteration was made."—P. 36.

Johnson has given many specimens, any one of which might justify the assertion in my text. I insert here, as the most remarkable, the famous simily of the moonlight.

As when in stillness of the silent night.
As when the moon in all her lustre bright.
As when the moon, refulgent lamp of night,
O'er Heaven's *clear* azure *sheds* her *silver* light;
pure spreads sacred
As still in air the trembling lustre stood,
And o'er its golden border shoots a flood;
When *no loose gale* disturbs the deep serene,
not a breath
And *no dim* cloud o'ercasts the solemn scene,
not a
Around her silver throne the planets glow,
And stars unnumber'd trembling beams bestow;
Around her throne the vivid planets roll,
And stars unnumber'd gild the glowing pole;
Clear gleams *of light o'er the dark trees are seen,*
o'er the dark trees a yellow sheds,
O'er the dark trees a yellower *green* they shed,
gleam
verdure
And tip with silver all the *mountain* heads,
forest
And tip with silver every mountain's head.
The vallies open and the forests rise.
The vales appear, the rocks in prospects rise.
Then shine the vales, the rocks in prospect rise.
All nature stands reveal'd before our eyes;
A flood of glory bursts from all the skies.
The conscious shepherd, joyful at the sight,
Eyes the blue vault, and numbers every light.
The conscious *swains rejoicing at the sight,*
shepherds gazing with delight,
Eye the blue vault, and bless the *vivid* light.
glorious
useful.

Cowper must have smiled when he read his Aunt Madan's eulogium on Pope in her Progress of Poetry.

High on the radiant list, see Pope appears,
With all the fire of youth and strength of years!
Where'er supreme he points the nervous line,
Nature and Art in bright conjunction shine.
How just the turns! how regular the draught!
How smooth the language! how refined the thought!
Secure beneath the shade of early bays,
He dared the thunder of great Homer's lays;
A sacred heat inform'd his heaving breast,
And Homer in his genius stands confess'd:
To heights sublime he raised the ponderous lyre,
And our cold isle grew warm with Grecian fire.

Poetical Calendar, vol. iii. p. 27.

The lines which this lady, before her marriage, wrote on her brother Ashley's Coke upon Littleton are free from the false diction of this panegyric.

O thou who labourest in this rugged mine,
May'st thou to gold the unpolish'd ore refine!
May each dark page unfold its haggard brow!
Doubt not to reap if thou canst bear to plough!
To tempt thy care may each revolving night
Purses and maces swim before thy sight!
From hence in times to come, adventurous deed!
May'st thou essay to look and speak like Mead!
When the black bag and rose no more shall shade
With martial air the honours of thy head;
When the full wig thy visage shall enclose,
And only leave to view thy learned nose,
Safely may'st thou defy beaux, wits, and scoffers,
While tenants, in fee simple, stuff thy coffers.

Dodsley's Collection, vol. iv. p. 228.

SWEET MEAT HAS SOUR SAUCE:

OR,

THE SLAVE-TRADER IN THE DUMPS.

Referred to p. 315.

A TRADER I am to the African shore,
But since that my trading is like to be o'er,
I'll sing you a song that you ne'er heard before,
Which nobody can deny, deny,
Which nobody can deny.

When I first heard the news it gave me a shock,
Much like what they call an electrical knock,
And now I am going to sell off my stock,
Which nobody, &c.

'Tis a curious assortment of dainty regales,
To tickle the Negroes with when the ship sails,
Fine chains for the neck, and a cat with nine tails,
Which nobody, &c.

Here's supple-jack plenty, and store of rat-tan,
That will wind itself round the sides of a man,
As close as a hoop round a bucket or can,
Which nobody, &c.

Here's padlocks and bolts, and screws for the thumbs,
That squeeze them so lovingly till the blood comes,
They sweeten the temper like comfits or plums,
Which nobody, &c.

When a Negro his head from his victuals withdraws,
And clenches his teeth and thrusts out his paws,
Here's a notable engine to open his jaws,
Which nobody, &c.

Thus going to market, we kindly prepare
A pretty black cargo of African ware,
For what they must meet with when they get there,
Which nobody, &c.

'Twould do your heart good to see 'em below,
Lie flat on their backs all the way as we go,
Like sprats on a gridiron, scores in a row,
Which nobody, &c.

But ah! if in vain I have studied an art
So gainful to me, all boasting apart,
I think it will break my compassionate heart,
Which nobody, &c.

For oh! how it enters my soul like an awl!
This pity, which some people self-pity call,
Is sure the most heart-piercing pity of all,
Which nobody, &c.

So this is my song, as I told you before;
Come, buy off my stock, for I must no more
Carry Cæsars and Pompeys to Sugar-cane shore,
Which nobody can deny, deny,
Which nobody can deny.

END OF VOL. II.

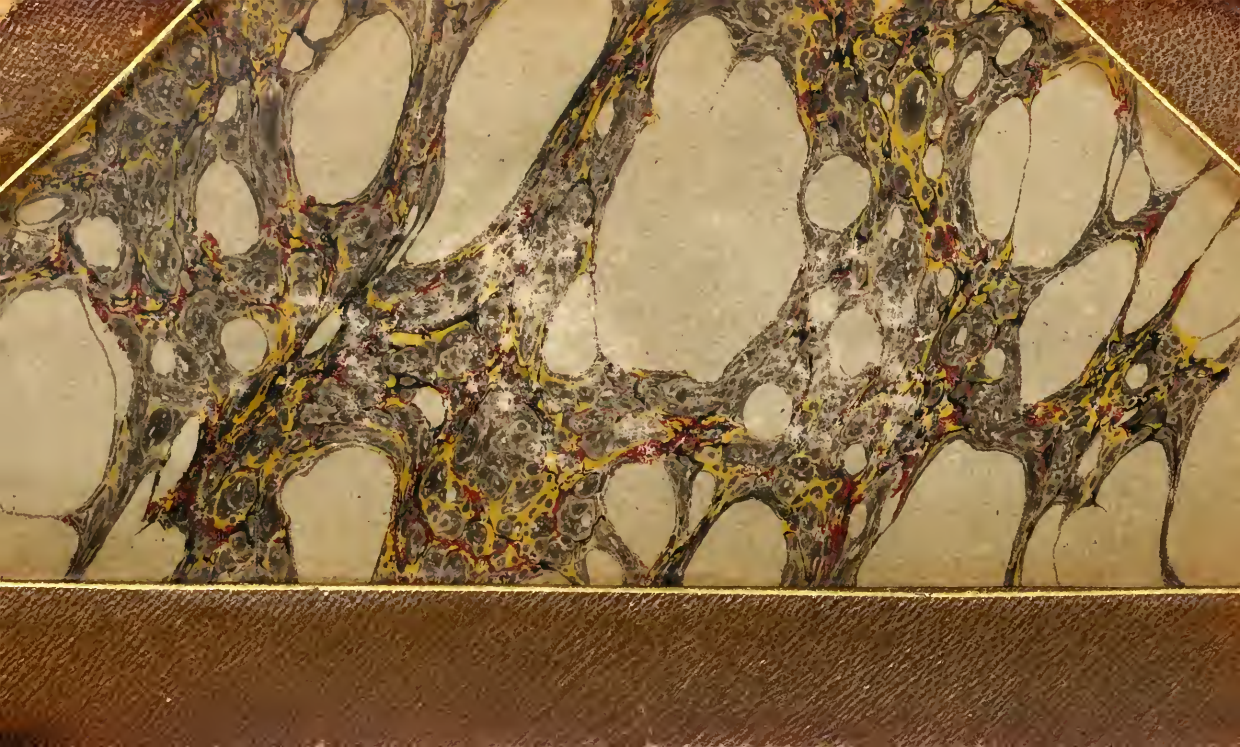
CHISWICK:
PRINTED BY C. WHITTINGHAM.

This book is DUE on the last
date stamped below

OCT 1 0 1961

3m-6,'50(550)470

UNI E LIBR
OF CA

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY
AA 000 365 455 5

PR
3380
A5S7
v.2